Policy WATCH

Volume XIII, Issue 8
August 2024, New Delhi

Governance and Development

In this issue

Rajiv@80

Contents

RAJIV GANDHI
INSTITUTE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES

Editorial

The Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies (RGICS) works on five themes:

1. Constitutional Values and Democratic Institutions
2. Growth with Employment
3. Governance and Development
4. Environment, Natural Resources and Sustainability
5. India's Place in the World

This issue of Policy Watch is on the theme - Governance and Development. As 20th August 2024 is the 80th birth anniversary of late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, we dedicate this issue to him.

The very first article is a speech by Rajiv ji on Secularism. Though he spoke on 1989, the speech has high contemporary relevance. Indeed since the time he spoke, the communal virus has eaten deeply into the nation's social fabric. What is tragic is that the people have spoken clearly against politics based on religious communalism. Despite the defeat in Ayodhya and Manipur, and rout in UP, the BJP government continues to pursue this poisonous strategy.

We need to remember how much Rajiv ji did to bring peace and harmony in the country. The second article is by a long term associate of Rajiv ji. He is a former distinguished civil servant, Wajahat Habibullah. Taken from his recently published memoirs, we have excerpts from a chapter titled Discord and Accord. It shows how Rajiv ji and his hand picked teams worked to bring about peace in Punjab, Assam and Mizoram.

The third article is a review by Smt Meera Shankar, IFS Retd, on the recent book by Mani Shankar Iyer titled The Rajiv I Knew. It gives a panoramic overview of Rajiv ji's multifarious contributions. Yet neither the book nor the review are hagiographic. They state what was done and it's impact, which many times was not as intended or adequate.

The next article, by Rajiv ji's close technocrat associate, Sam Pitroda describes how the Technology Missions were established and what those achieved - from drinking water to oilseeds. Of course Sam's major work in upgrading India's telecom is well known and is thus not mentioned except at the beginning of the article, which is taken from 2016 autobiography.

The last article is about Rajiv ji's abiding contribution to establishing local self government in India's villages and districts, and in towns and cities. Rajiv ji led all the groundwork for it but the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution were enacted two years after his tragic assassination. The article by Dr Palanithurai who taught at the Gandhigram University, reviewed the state of Panchayat Raj.

Taken together this bouquet of five articles shoukd give the reader some idea of the deep and wide-ranging contributions Rajivji made to India's Governance and Development. We hope you enjoy reading the issue and would appreciate any feedback by email on vijay.mahajan@rgfindia.org

Vijay Mahajan
Director, Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies

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Google Images (free to use images)
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1) Secular India alone can survive

Rajiv Gandhi [1]

A Secular India alone is an India that can survive. Perhaps an India that is not secular does not deserve to survive. India and secularism must remain synonymous to assure the glory of our civilisation and the future of our country.

In every village of India, in every basti and in every mohalla, there are people of different faiths, of different languages, of different cultures who live together as neighbours. Secularism is a condition of our existence. It is the essence of our tradition. Secularism and our nationhood are inseparable.

We are a multi-religious society, we are a multi-lingual society, we are a multi-cultural society, but we are not a multi-national society. We are one people, we are one nation, we are one country and we have one common citizenship.

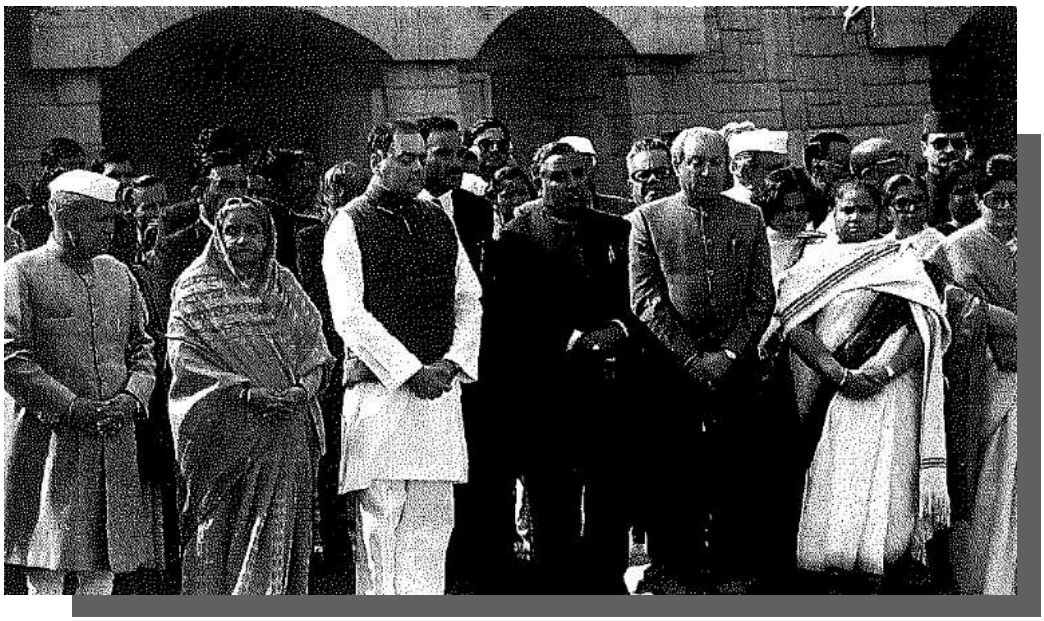
Most civilisations posit nationhood and diversity as antithetical. The single greatest contribution of India to world civilisation is to demonstrate that there is nothing antithetical between diversity and nationhood.

Through 5000 years of living experience, we have demonstrated to the world that our unity in diversity is a vibrant reality.

Today's world is in desperate need of learning from India's experience. Peace and survival in the modern age depend on non-violence, on tolerance, on compassion and understanding, on peaceful co-existence between diverse philosophies and diverse ways of life.

Through technological development, the world is becoming smaller and is growing into a global village. The world is equally in need of unity and diversity.

[1] Speech at a function held to celebrate the 125th year of publication of The Pioneer, New Delhi, 7 June 1989



Paying homage at Rajghat on Martyrs Day, January 1989

India's secularism is a global need because global secularism is inseparable from human survival, it is inseparable from global inter-dependence, it is inseparable from global co-operation.

The history of humanity is blood-splattered with the consequences of narrow-minded nationalisms equating community with nation, religion with nation, language with nation, ethnicity with nation. To escape history's trap of turbulence and tragedy, many countries and regional groupings are now seeking to escape the exclusivisms of past.

They are reaching towards multi-cultural societies, where diverse faiths, languages and cultures can live together in harmony, equality and confidence, in the confidence that they can conserve their heritage and their culture, with the self-confidence to exchange ideas and experiences, to live together without the cross-fertilization of ideas leading to cultural genocide.

In this world-wide effort, the world is learning from India's unity in diversity. No other civilisation has as long a record as ours in evolving a composite culture. No other country has as long a record as ours of a polity based on secularism.

Notwithstanding thousands of years of secularism, the forces of communalism have not been vanquished. The history of India is a kind of dialectic between the forces of secularism, tolerance and compassion versus the forces of communalism, fundamentalism and fanaticism.

In the long run, secularism will always triumph. But the never-ceasing running battle with the opposing forces of communal- ism continues, which we must fight.

It is also important to understand how India sees secularism. How do we understand secularism?

First and foremost, our secularism is not anti-religious or irreligious. We have a deep and abiding appreciation of the rich vein of spirituality that runs through our culture that runs through every religion of India. It runs through our history, it runs through every person who is an Indian.

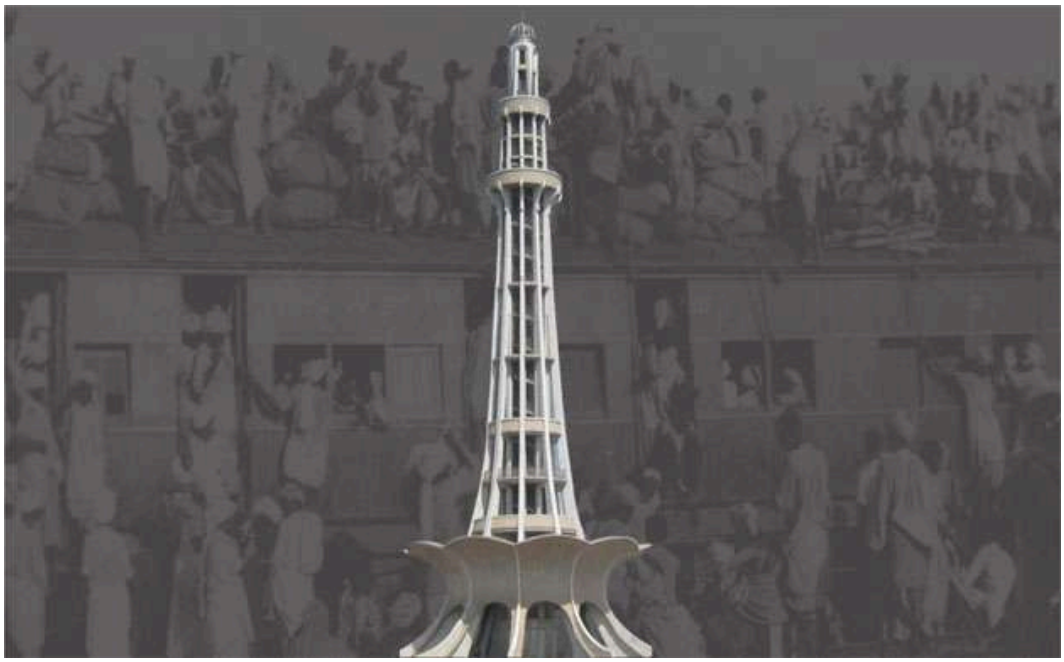
That rich vein of spirituality is the source of our moral values, of our ideals and our standards, of our goals and of our objectives. We venerate this spiritual tradition. We cherish its moral values. We respect all the different forms ' in which this spirituality manifests itself. The cardinal principle of our secularism is equal respect for all religions: *sarva dharma samabhaava.*

Our second great principle is that we respect all religions equally. No religious community is singled out for favours by the State, no religious community is subjected to any disability or disadvantage by the State. The State has no religion. The State is above religion.

For the State, religion is a private and personal matter for the individual. Whatever religion an Indian professes, whatever faith an Indian propagates, for the State it is a personal matter. The State is concerned only with full protection for all, with equal opportunity for all, with equitable benefits for all. For the State, all Indians are Indians, equal in the eyes of the State.

We have not forgotten, and we will never forget the terrible consequences to the Freedom Movement of the mixing of religion with politics. From the War of Independence that started in 1857 to 1940, Indians of all communities, except communalists, were together in the battle to free India, to make India independent.

Soon after, the Lahore Resolution was passed by the Muslim League. Because of the Quit India Movement, the secular leaders of all communities and religions at that time were mostly in jail or had gone underground. It gave an opportunity for the communalists to make inroads into the mainstream. Within less than a decade of the Lahore Resolution, India was partitioned.



Source: Image

We shall never let another partition of India happen again. We shall never again let the forces of communalism triumph over secularism.

A patriotic Indian is a secular Indian. A nationalist Indian is a secular Indian. A dedicated Indian is a secular Indian. A disciplined Indian is a secular Indian.

Through forty years of Independence we have shown that we are one nation. We have faced external aggression as a united nation. We have stood firm as one nation against the internal forces of fundamentalism and fanaticism. It is illustrated most dramatically by what has happened in Punjab. The protagonists of secession found common cause with religious fanatics. Together, they roped in terrorists, murderers, hired assassins, gun-runners, smugglers and common criminals, mixing politics with religion, mixing religion with criminality.

Gurudwaras were turned into criminal dens till Operation Black Thunder, proving that terrorism was not for religion, not for religious purposes but for ulterior motives. The people were disgusted at the defilement of the shrines and the misuse of religion. They were disgusted with the intimidation of the grant his and the oppression of the sevadars.

The people of Punjab have not given in. The tolerance of our people has triumphed. The brotherhood of centuries has triumphed. The innate secularism of our people has triumphed.

But the forces of communalism have not accepted defeat. They are always on the prowl, always looking for an opportunity to make mischief, always trying to insinuate themselves into the political life of the country, working from behind the scenes or using others as a front. If the secular forces stand together, communalism can be contained. The danger arises when political parties, for opportunistic reasons, lend the weight of their support to narrow causes.

As a Government, our foremost duty is to safeguard secularism. We invite the co-operation of every section of this House to join us in this great national endeavour. I welcome the suggestion that has been made by Shri Indrajit Gupta. I have already requested the Home Minister to call all the secular parties, all the nationalist parties and to talk with them and work with them to see how we can build a composite culture.

Our secular traditions began with the Vedas and the epics. The concept of the *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, further developed by the Buddha and Mahavira, was the basis for the development of Indian civilisation and of our society. We welcomed Judaism in Kerala; we welcomed St. Thomas and Christianity; we welcomed Zoroastrianism and today we have the largest Parsi community in the world; we welcomed the great Sikh Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh. We synthesized Islam and the great Sufi tradition of Amir Khusro and Kabir and Baba Farid and Shah Abdul Latif. Our religious festivals are festivals not of one community but of all Indians and all communities. We celebrate them together.

Over the last 40 years we have augmented our capacity to tackle communalism. It is reflected in the declining trend in communal incidents. It is reflected in the containment in the numbers of persons losing their lives and suffering injury in communal clashes. But the task has not ended. It will not end till there are no more communal incidents, till there is no more loss of life or limb or property. Indeed, even then, highest vigilance will be required to keep communalism at bay. We will have to fight communalism till it is defeated and ended and completely vanquished.

Law and order is a State subject. The Centre can at best consider the national perspective, issue guidelines and assist State Governments, but the primary responsibility lies squarely with the State Governments. The State Governments have been assisted time and again by the courts, and I would specially like to congratulate the Bombay High Court and justice Barucha for their historic decision.

We have commended to the Chief Ministers the far-reaching recommendations of the National Integration Council's sub-group headed by Shri P.N. Haksar. There has been some effect, although the overall action has not been to our satisfaction. The overall communal situation has become better than in the past. But there is no room for complacency. The communal monster must be laid low.

Source: Image

The challenge to secularism is not from one quarter, but from fanatics of all faiths, stirring trouble in various ways. There are those who ignore our composite culture and project to their followers, a distorted and motivated picture of India's history, creating grievances where there are none, making political capital out of distressed religions sentiments.

It is for the State Governments to be alive to such attempts, to set up an intelligence system for advance information about trouble-makers and trouble-spots. It is for State Governments to take preventive action and quick, corrective measures.

No State Government, Congress or non-Congress, can claim an unblemished record. All State Governments, Congress and non- Congress, have attempted to tackle the problem. No State Government has ever been refused the full assistance of the Centre in preventing or tackling the problems in a particular situation. This is not an issue between the Centre and the State. It is not an issue between the Congress and other parties. It is a national issue, and it is an issue that demands a national response.

The elements of a response, formulated through a general consensus and the consent of the country, is what is needed. The secular injunctions of the Constitution must be carried out in good faith and with deep dedication. Religion must not be mixed with politics. No one doing so can run for elections today after our recent amendments. But still there are some political parties who have not amended their constitutions. These political parties must amend their constitutions and bring them into conformity with the nation's Constitution.

The minorities needing educational and economic help must be assisted to avail of equality of opportunity as guaranteed by the law. Genuine grievances must be tackled quickly.

Imaginary grievances must be quickly exposed. The machinery of law and order must be insulated from all religious prejudice, from all communal overtones. The people of India must be involved in giving practical expression to their innate secularism.

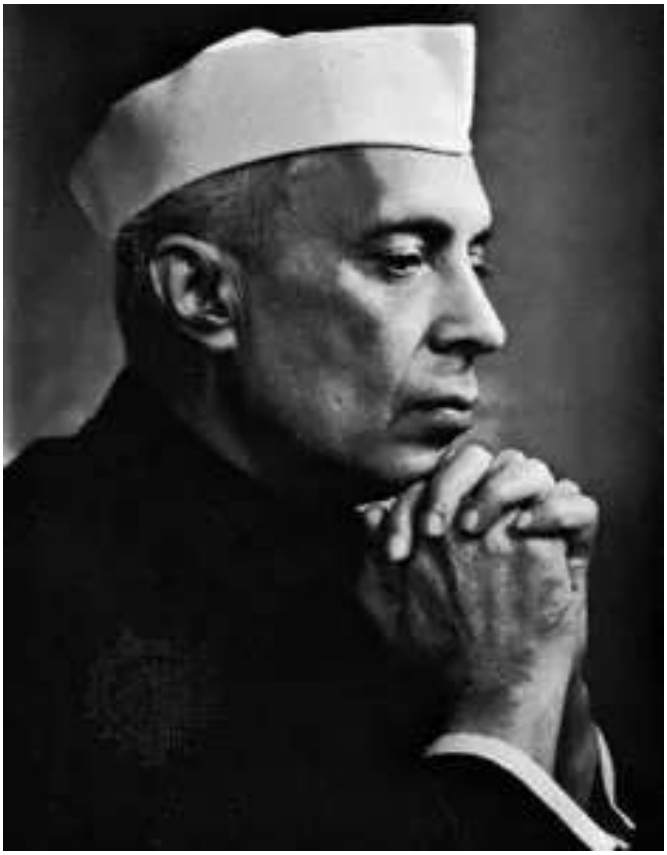
This year we are celebrating the birth centenary of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. He was one of our greatest secular leaders, perhaps one of the greatest secular leaders of all time.

When Gandhiji was felled by religious fanatics, the national responsibility of carrying forward secularism fell on Panditji's shoulders.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru staunched the blood-letting of Partition, reassured the minorities, and reformed the obsolete and oppressive mores of the majority community. He gave Indians of all faiths, the confidence that the State is above all prejudice, above all discrimination, above all narrowness. He assured every Indian of honour and opportunity.

We would soon like to call a meeting of the National Integration Council to discuss the issue of communalism and we would like that to be followed up after the Home Minister has his initial meetings with leaders and members of the Opposition parties.

In a few days, we will be commemorating the 25th anniversary of the passing away of Panditji. There can be no more significant manner of honouring Panditji's memory than in fulfilling his ideal, in re-dedicating ourselves, in re-dedicating India and every Indian, to the principles of secularism which Jawaharlal Nehru espoused, and the unflinching application of the principles to the political and social life of our country.



Source: Image

2.) Discord and Accord

Wajahat Habibullah [2]

Source: Image

As I have described, Rajiv's India was a single tapestry woven of many threads. India's inherent diversity demanded mutual understanding to convert dissidence into harmony, something that Rajiv sought to encourage through his zonal cultural centres. But bringing peoples together would inevitably disturb established traditional interests.

A 'son of the soil conflict' is what has confronted the building of a pluralist nation state, which is what India has aspired to be. Such conflict in India has often been violent. Princeton University professor Myron Weiner's book *Sons of the Soil'* is a definitive study of the relationship between internal migration and ethnic conflict in India.

The book brought focus on intercultural and interstate mass movement throughout what has fructified into an Indian nation, examining both the social and the political consequences of these interethnic migrations. Such was the conflict that brought civil war to Sri Lanka. It also beset India's northeast.

Professors James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, political scientists at Stanford University, have further defined a 'sons of the soil conflict' as having the following core features: 'First, it involves conflict between members of a minority ethnic group concentrated in some region of a country, and relatively recent, ethnically distinct migrants to this region from other parts of the same country. Second, the members of the minority group think of their group as indigenous, and as rightfully possessing the area as their group's ancestral (or at least very long-standing) home?

'Conflict' by this definition meant competition and dispute over scarce resources such as land, jobs, educational quotas, government services, or natural resources. Like China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand and Myanmar-the other Asian countries on Fearon and Laitin's list-India too has major lowland river plains densely populated by a large ethnic group. And so as independent India emerged as a nation under the shadow of a violent Partition, it saw conflicts with varying degrees of violence in Tamil Nadu, the northeast, Punjab and Kashmir.

[2] From: Habibullah, Wajahat (2024). The Rajiv I Knew. Westland, New Delhi.

Moreover, the federal components of the union were not, unlike the European Union or the component states of the USA, organised along sub-nationalist lines but were instead successors to British provinces and kingdoms themselves drawn down from the Mughal subah, so designated for administrative convenience or by imperial acquisition.

This issue had been sought to be addressed through the reorganisation of states in India-a process subsisting into the twenty-first century and which didn't necessarily imply a movement for secession from the country but simply a recognition of identity. So, Rajiv Gandhi had inherited an India that was still under construction, but he was clear that while he could understand a cultural, social and linguistic identity of a people, he could not countenance a separate national identity other than Indian for any Indians.

On assuming office as the prime minister, Rajiv cast about for means of reconciliation with the various contestants of India's cohesion; hence followed a series of 'accords. The assassination of Indira Gandhi and the violence that followed ensured that the first of these was the Rajiv-Longowal Accord of 1985 on Punjab, called the 'Memorandum of Settlement, seeking to end the Sikh imbroglio in Punjab.

Source: Image

The Sikh nation was an idea born well before Independence, drawing inspiration in the twentieth century from Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Sikh kingdom of the mid-nineteenth, not restricted to Punjab as 'homeland' but seeing itself as pan-Indian.

The Sikh scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, draws from works of both Hindu and Muslim seers from across India, including what was to become Pakistan, and its major shrines are located across what had been the Mughal Empire. Unified from 1767 to 1799 in a confederacy of Sikh clans known as Misls founded by Banda Bahadur, a former Hindu and a devotee of Guru Gobind Singh, from predominantly Muslim Harni in Mendhar Tehsil of today's Poonch District of Jammu and Kashmir-of which I had served as District Development Commissioner (1973-77)—a vibrant, predominantly Muslim kingdom emerged in the north-west under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, as the Mughal Empire floundered in precipitous decline under the successors of Emperor Bahadur Shah I (1707-1712).

The ascendant British power, supposedly friendly, blocked its expansion east of the Sutlej, where also the remainder of Sikh Misls ruled in smaller kingdoms, so that the bulk of Ranjit Singh's kingdom lay in today's Pakistan.

Although concentrated in Punjab, the Sikhs were never in a majority there, and had a significant presence in many states including Afghanistan. Before the partition of India in 1947, the Sikhs were in majority only in the district of Ludhiana (41.6 per cent). The dissection of the Punjab in the creation of Pakistan shattered this syncretism.

In the late 1930s and 1940s, with the idea of a Muslim homeland, was also born the idea of a separate Sikh state centred in the Punjab. This began the territorialisation of the Sikh community, in tandem with the Qarardad-e-Lahore; the Lahore Resolution of the All India Muslim League, a political statement presented by A.K. Fazlul Haq, prime minister of Bengal, to the three-day general session of 22-24 March 1940 of the League, calling for independence of territorially contiguous states, 'in which the Muslims are numerically in a majority? In stout opposition to the idea of Pakistan emerged the idea of a theocratic Sikhistan, a state covering parts of the greater Punjab.

With Partition came the bloody division of Punjab province between India and the newly created Pakistan. Although Jinnah had made promises to the Sikh leadership, these had remained amorphous. With a population in 1941 as high as 19.8 per cent in some districts of what was to become Pakistan, after division under the ill-conceived Radcliffe Line, the Sikh population was reduced to 0.1 per cent in all of them, and rose sharply in the districts assigned to India, with the Muslim population eliminated altogether in much of East Punjab, even in Muslim majority districts such as Gurdaspur. Even so, the Sikhs remained a minority in India's Punjab, a Hindu-majority province.

Khalistan as a separatist movement was never an issue until the late 1970s and 1980s when it began a menacing militarisation. How then did the demand for a state of Khalistan rise? Some ascribe it to developments within India and others privilege the role of the Sikh diaspora. These narratives vary in the form of governance posited for the proposed state (was it to be a theocracy or a republic?), in the proposed name and even in the precise geographical boundaries.

After independence, the Akalis led a movement for a Punjabi Suba, seeking the creation of a province with a Sikh majority, the progenitor in substance to the demand for a Sikh nation, Khalistan. With the ascension of the Indira Gandhi-led union government, the demand for a Punjabi Suba was accepted with passage in Parliament on 7 September 1966 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, trifurcating Punjab, separating Haryana and transferring some areas to Himachal Pradesh. Coveted by both Punjab and Haryana, the Le Corbusier-designed city of Chandigarh became a union territory and capital to both.

Source: Image

Worsted in the state election of 1972, the Akali Dal then put forward the Anandpur Sahib Resolution in 1973 to demand a radical devolution of power and further autonomy to Punjab. The resolution document had both religious and political implications.

Protesting clause (2)(b) of Article 25 of the Indian constitution, which states, 'the reference to Hindus shall be construed as including a reference to persons professing the Sikh, Jaina, or Buddhist religion,' a clause resented also by the other religious groups mentioned in it even as I write, the Akalis demanded that the constitution recognise these religions as separate. They also asked for transfer of Chandigarh and certain other areas to Punjab, and a larger share of water for irrigation and that power devolve radically from the Centre to state governments.

Barely noticed at birth, the Anandpur Sahib Resolution was resurrected in the 1980s with the emergence of the militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale of the Damdami Taksal. Bhindranwale made common cause with the Akali Dal to launch the Dharam Yudh Morcha in 1982 with the demand for the implementation of the Anandpur Sahib Resolution as the cornerstone. Thousands joined the movement, but it is important to remember that its title was a misnomer, for it was no crusade. Its objective in the public mind was simply seeking resolution of development needs.

Source: Image

But parallel to the emerging situation within India, particularly after 1971, Sikh youth-by then a prosperous diaspora in North America and Europe-had begun to promote among Sikhs the notion of a sovereign and independent state of Khalistan.

The history of the Khalistan Council, with moorings in West London, provides a thread to this narrative. Here Jagjit Singh Chohan, a former minister in the Akali government in Punjab, two years after losing the Punjab Assembly elections in 1969, moved to the UK to begin a campaign for creation of a sovereign Khalistan.

He found few takers. But the trauma of Pakistan following its defeat in the 1971 war vested new dimensions to the movement; Chohan was invited to visit Pakistan. He went to Nankana Sahib in Pakistan, toured historic gurdwaras that abound in Pakistan's Punjab, and propounded to an eagerly receptive press in Pakistan the idea of Khalistan, receiving wide coverage.

It was this coverage that virtually introduced to the Indian public and the world's Sikh community the idea of Khalistan. But already, while on a visit to the US, Chohan had put an advertisement in the New York Times on 13 October 1971 proclaiming an independent Sikh state, striking a chord in the Sikh diaspora that brought him millions of dollars.

Despite charges of sedition in India, Chohan was able to move about freely, proceeding in 1980 to announce in London and in Amritsar: a Khalistan National Council-with himself as the president and Balbir Singh Sandhu as its secretary general- and the release of stamps and currency of a notional country called Khalistan.

With Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale's campaign for a Sikh theocratic homeland turning violent, the globalised Sikh diaspora began to take note. Yet, the movement remained at best on the fringes of the global political stage, until Operation Blue Star catapulted it to centre.

It was in the late 1970s and early 1980s that the separatist movement began to militarise under Bhindranwale, who articulated their grievances as discrimination and as the undermining of Sikh identity. The Congress supported candidates backed by Bhindranwale in the 1978 Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) elections in a bid to weaken the Akali Dal, by then its chief political rival in Punjab.

Congress leader Zail Singh encouraged the separatist Dal Khalsa to disrupt meetings of the Akali Dal. In return, in the 1980 election that brought the Congress back to government at the Centre, Bhindranwale supported Congress candidates Gurdial Singh Dhillon and Raghunandan Lal Bhatia. By the early 1980s, Bhindranwale had become a major leader of Punjab. Armed Khalistan militants began to roam the Punjabi countryside, describing themselves as 'kharku'; righteous warrior.

There followed a series of killings in which Bhindranwale was suspect. Leader of the Nirankari sect, Gurbachan Singh, was killed on 24 April 1980 in retaliation for killings of conservative Sikhs. Lala Jagat Narain-owner of the Hind Samachar group of newspapers, a Congress leader and a prominent critic of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale-was assassinated in September 1981.

A white paper issued by the government of India mentioned that Narain was assassinated because of his criticism of Bhindranwale. On 15 September 1981, Bhindranwale was arrested, but then released in October by the Punjab State Government for want of evidence.

Initially then, the Akali Dal opposed Bhindranwale, even accusing him of being a Congress agent. But by August 1982, under the leadership of Harcharan Singh Longowal, they joined hands in launching the Dharam Yudh Morcha (Group for the Battle for Righteousness), which, although appealing to the public on civic issues, demanded action on the forgotten Anandpur Sahib Resolution. Thousands joined. Two Indian Airlines flights were hijacked and an assassination of Punjab's chief minister, Darbara Singh, was attempted.

In response to the Akali Dal's statement acknowledging that Sikhs were Indians, and that the Anandpur Sahib resolution asked only for a Sikh state of Khalistan, the Union government released all arrested Akali workers in mid-October and appointed the inveterate Union Minister Swaran Singh as emissary. Bhindranwale, who was by then regarded as the 'single most important Akali leader, announced that nothing less than full implementation of the Anandpur resolution was acceptable.

Nevertheless, other Akali leaders agreed to join the negotiations with Swaran Singh's team, which ended with a compromise. But when this was presented to the Parliament, changes inserted under advice from the Haryana and Rajasthan chief ministers, it outraged the Akali leadership.

In November 1982, Longowal announced that the Akali Dal would disrupt the Asian Games due to be staged in Delhi, while Rajiv was the chair of the organising committee. A week before the Asian games, Bhajan Lal's Haryana government sealed the border between Delhi and Punjab. Frisking of all the Sikh visitors travelling from Punjab to Delhi was ordered.

The Akali Dal could only muster small and scattered protests in Delhi. But this humiliation of being frisked and searched was deeply mortifying to the proud Sikh community, leading many who did not support Akalis and Bhindranwale to begin sympathising with the Akali Morcha. But what is little known is that to preclude any outbreak, Rajiv had several quiet meetings with Longowal at Vijay Dhar's home.

Dhar recalls that the two took to each other, a relationship that was to stand them in good stead when they were to negotiate the accord following Operation Blue Star. On the conclusion of the games, however, Longowal organised a convention of Sikh ex-servicemen at the Durbar Sahib. It was attended by a large number of Sikh ex-servicemen, including Maj. Gen. Shabeg Singh, hero of the Bangladesh war.

In tandem with the agitation of the Akali Dal, in the two years between 4 August 1982 and 3 June 1984, followers of Bhindranwale spread disorder across Punjab. More than 1,200 violent incidents brought death to 410 and injured 1,180. By 1984, between 1 January and 3 June, the situation went into a tailspin with 775 violent incidents killing 298 and injuring 525.

This climaxed with the brutal murder of Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Avtar Singh Atwal, killed on 25 April 1983 at the gate of Harmandir Sahib. His body lay unattended there for hours for fear of Bhindranwale. The government of India's response was Operation Blue Star, in which the army units were led by Sikh Lt. Gen Brar. Thus followed India's descent into tragedy.

Rajiv and Longowal in their consequent accord, agreed on greater autonomy in Centre-state relations, sharing of river waters and a host of other less troublesome concerns of the Sikh community, outlining a process for pursuing the demands of the Sikh-dominated state of Punjab for territorial adjustments with the neighbouring state of Haryana.

Well-deserved tributes have been paid to the Sikh majority Punjab Police, commanded by its Sikh director general K.P.S. Gill, in finally bringing closure to the move for secession. The Intelligence Bureau under M.K. Narayanan, the National Security Guard under Ved Marwah, other paramilitary forces and the Indian army provided critical support.

'But, the Indian public and the political leadership as a whole hardly knew of the stealth role played by [G.C.] Saxena, [S.E.] Joshi and [A.K.] Verma (succeeding chiefs of R&AW [Research and Analysis Wing]) in making our counter- terrorism success in Punjab possible. While Saxena and Joshi laid the foundation for an active and strong liaison network and for improving the R&AW's capability for the collection of terrorism- related HUMINT, Verma gave the R&AW the teeth which made Pakistan realise that its sponsorship of terrorism would not be cost-free,' wrote noted security analyst, B. Raman. That was indeed the vital element in India's security apparatus injected by Rajiv.

Weiner has observed that river plains in states in which those that are considered sons of the soil are resident are often bordered by rough, much less developed mountainous terrain inhabited by diverse indigenous ethnic minorities-often 'hill tribes'-who use slash-and-burn agriculture or are pastoralists.

Population pressure in the river valleys can make expansion to these formerly peripheral lands attractive for the dominant ethnic group. This is what happened in the Brahmaputra Valley, with the migration of Bengalis settling to cultivate the rich alluvial plains of that mighty river.

Well before 1979, when what has become known as the anti-alien movement in Assam was launched by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU), the vexed question of migration had persisted.

Source: Image

The 1826 Treaty of Yandabo between the British East India Company and the Governor of Legaing, Burma ended the first Anglo-Burmese war-the most expensive war in British Indian history. Under the treaty, Assam became a part of the British Empire, with Burma ceding to the Company, among other territories, Rakhine (Arakan) and Taninthayi (Tenasserim) and its claims to the Ahom kingdom, the predecessor to the state of Assam.

The Ahom kingdom had been an independent kingdom since it was established in 1228 CE by Chaolung Siu-Ka-Pha (also known as Chaolung Sukaphaa) of a Chinese clan originating in the present-day Yunnan province, which never recognised Burmese suzerainty and so was not the Government of Burma's to cede. The kingdom had repulsed a Mughal invasion that had briefly occupied Guwahati, led by the Kachwaha Mirza Raja Ram Singh I, Maharaja of Jaipur and cousin to then Indian emperor Aurangzeb.

The imperial army was defeated in 1671 at Saraighat on the Brahmaputra. After its cession to India, the new frontier drew settlers from many other Indian provinces, but mostly Bengal, which included present-day Bihar, to work in British-owned tea estates. Business boomed, but labour was lacking.

Not having confidence in the locals, who made fierce warriors but indifferent labourers, British colonial officials trained Bengalis for administrative positions, and their descendants, educated in English-medium schools, became the first generation of professionals in Assam, with administration run in Bengali rather than Assamese.

Young Bengalis flooded Assam in search of these new middle-class jobs. To make matters even worse for the indigenous population, when the Muslim League took control of the state government in 1936, albeit briefly, the government of Sir Syed Muhammad Saadulla pushed hard for more immigration to assure the Muslim League a Muslim majority.

Because the Muslim majority district of Sylhet had been transferred from Bengal to Assam in 1874, Assam had a Bengali-speaking population twice that of Assamese speakers in 1947.

Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi rescued Assam from cession to East Pakistan by agreeing to a plebiscite whereby Sylhet was reverted to Bengal and hence, to East Pakistan, leaving Assam with a Hindu majority. This made him hero to the Assamese.

The boundaries with that part of Pakistan remained tenuous until finally resolved only with the Land Boundary Agreement between prime ministers Narendra Modi and Sheikh Hasina in 2015. It is noteworthy that in implementing Partition, the role of Governor Sir Akbar Hydari (May 1947-December 1948) and the most senior military officer in the state, my father, then the independent Sub- Area Commander of Eastern Command Brig. Enaith Habibullah was critical in retaining the territory for India. In his address to the Assam Assembly in September 1947, Sir Akbar was able to announce:

The natives of Assam are now masters of their own house. They have a government which is both responsible and responsible to them. The Bengali no longer has the power, even if he had the will, to impose anything on the people of these hills and valleys which constitute Assam.

By 1976, with the emergence of Bangladesh, local police took to harassing Bengalis with the threat of confiscating citizenship papers, and Assamese agitators began to intimidate those whom they considered foreigners, especially those of Bengali stock, both Hindu and Muslim.

The CRPF, on the other hand, drawn from across India, weighed in on the side of the immigrants, killing an Assamese agitator in an attempt at peacekeeping to end the assaults on immigrants, turning him into a martyr. Therein lay the beginnings of violence between local Assamese and mainly immigrant-minority communities.

The bypoll in Mangaldoi in 1978 on the death of its sitting MP Hiralal Patwari brought the issue into the national spotlight. The constituency, with a very high concentration of East Bengal immigrants, highlighted a sudden rise in the number of voters compared to the previous election that was held but two years earlier, sparking rumours of a massive ingress from Bangladesh.

On 8 June 1979, the AASU went on a twelve-hour general strike demanding the 'detention, disenfranchisement and deportation' of all foreigners. So while the immigration issue had come up fitfully hitherto, it was only in 1979 that it began plaguing the contours of ethnic and religious relations in Assam for years to come.

The strike of 8 June inspired the formation of the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad (AAGSP) to lead a state-wide movement. There were sit-ins, picketing in front of government offices and oil refineries, strikes, and symbolic disobedience of the law.

Upon the government returning to Indira Gandhi in 1980, starting with a letter of January 1980 from P.R. Mahanta to her on what he described as the alarming situation of the indigenous inhabitants in face of infiltration from Nepal and Bangladesh, close to twenty-three rounds of negotiations took place between the movement leaders and the central government until 1982.

Even though the talks were discontinued in 1983, cabinet secretary Krishnaswamy Rao Saheb, who had served as secretary to the PM, continued a secretive dialogue with AASU. Although the Assam movement had wide support, it must be recognised that its appeal was not universal, particularly in the Assamese political leadership, including that of the INC, which, given the size of the immigrant population and its diversity, fretted over the political consequences of concession to the movement.' Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia remained a stout opponent of AASU almost to the time of reaching agreement, and set up a rival students group- the Assam Students Sangram Parishad (AASP).

Source: Image

Assam shares a 269-km border with Bangladesh along the riverine Goalpara district in the south-west and along the south- eastern Cachar district. By early 1980, in ethnic violence in which Assam's police was said to have been complicit, nearly 200 Bengali immigrants were killed-precipitating riots that were to take 7,000 lives by 1985.

A particularly horrifying incident was the massacre of more than 2,000 Bengalis in 1983, including children, in Nellie and other villages in Nagaon district-names that have become a bloodied blot on the history of India's communal relationships. The victims were descendants of immigrants from the time of Sir Syed Muhammad Saadulla, prime minister of Assam in British India.

Nellie was seen as a fallout of the decision to hold the assembly elections in 1983 despite a boycott by the AASU. On the advice of K.P.S. Gill, then inspector general of the Assam police, the polls were held in phases to avoid violence. The police had identified sixty-three constituencies where elections might be held without trouble. But there were twenty-three where the carrying out of elections was deemed impossible.

Nellie was one those constituencies. Indira Gandhi campaigned vigorously in the election. In concluding her address to several of her many political gatherings, she repeatedly said khuda hafiz (literally 'God be with you' in Urdu/Farsi).

Being with her on her campaign, I could understand why Indira Gandhi, with her own Awadhi Urdu background, should use the term, a common greeting along with aadab that in Awadh was not associated with any religious community.

But this brought on her the accusation of pandering to a Muslim audience, although despite having been present I cannot recall the audiences so addressed having been exclusively Muslim or even primarily so. Here lay the initial stirring of what was to become the common place slur of 'appeasement' that emerged with Rajiv's Shah Bano amendment. Congress won that election with a mere 17.16 per cent of the total registered vote.

Speaking in the Parliament on a confidence motion of the thirteen- day BJP-led government in 1996, Indrajit Gupta of the Communist Party of India was to remind Prime Minister Vajpayee of a speech that he made in 1983 that preceded the massacre in Nellie.

'Foreigners have come here; and the Government does nothing, Vajpayee was quoted to have said, 'What if they had come into Punjab instead, people would have chopped them into pieces and thrown them away? Calling the speech inflammatory and irresponsible, Gupta said, "This is very different to the type of speech that he made here yesterday [when Vajpayee moved the motion in the Lok Sabha]?

The official Tiwari Commission report on the Nellie massacre has yet to see the light of day. Submitted to the Assam government in 1984, the Congress government of Hiteswar Saikia decided to keep it a closely guarded secret, thus setting an unfortunate precedent for reports of commissions on communal conflict. There have been legal efforts to make the commission report public, but full justice continues to elude the victims to this day, still housed in camps, exacerbating Assam's unsettled ethnic relations.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1982, by when I sat in the PMO as a director, a tenuous understanding had been reached between the Centre and the movement leaders. Under this agreement of which the record is not readily accessible, those who had made it within the Indian borders between 1951 and 1961 would be given citizenship status, while those who came after 1971 would be deported.

But the status of those who entered between 1961 and 1971 was left unresolved. There was no agreement on the procedure to be followed to determine the status of a resident, and what was to become of such a resident should he fail to establish the acceptable status. The onset of the elections of 1983, and the violence amid which they were held, put paid to the nascent understanding.

Rajiv resumed negotiations between the movement leaders and the central government upon assuming office in 1984. "The give and take of the conference table,' he declared, in describing what was to become the underlying theme of his approach to conflict, 'can yield victories, which confrontation cannot?

A 'Memorandum of Settlement' was signed between Prafulla Kumar Mahanta with other leaders of AASU and AAGSP, P.P. Trivedi, chief secretary, Assam and R.D. Pradhan, the secretary of Home Affairs of the Union government on 15 August 1985, while Rajiv and Home Minister S.B. Chavan looked on. The PM signed as witness to satisfy AASU's insistence that he be party.

The reaching of an accord was announced by the PM on that very day from the ramparts of the Red Fort, in his first Independence Day speech.

Under this accord, all those described as 'illegal aliens' who entered the state between January 1966 and March 1971 would be disenfranchised for ten years and those who came after March 1971 would be deported. Once the accord was signed, Hiteswar Saikia's Congress government, after initial resistance by Saikia, was dissolved and elections were held in December 1985 with revised electoral rolls.

Source: Image

Under the accord, all those who had come to Assam prior to 1 January 1966 would be given citizenship. Those who moved in between 1 January 1966 and 24 March 1971 would be 'detected' under the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946, and the Foreigners (Tribunals) Order, 1964.

Their names would be deleted from the electoral rolls in force and they would remain disenfranchised for a period of ten years.

Finally, according to the accord, those who came to Assam on or after 25 March 1971 shall continue to be 'detected, deleted and practical steps shall be taken to expel such foreigners?

With the signing of the accord, the agitation came to an end. 'The young Prime Minister, enthuses Pradhan, 'had fulfilled within eight months his promise to find solutions to the problems of Punjab and Assam.'14 Mahanta's Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) government took office.

In 1988, the Parliament duly amended the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act (IMDT), 1983 on which, in drafting the amendments, the state's AGP and central Congress governments worked amicably.

These were the amendments under which the process described in the accord, together with 'certain difficulties expressed by the AASU/AAGSP regarding the IMDT Act, were duly addressed.

This was the law under which the National Register of Citizens (NRC) was to be routinely updated, including detection, deletion from electoral rolls and deportation.

The accord allowed for two ways to acquire citizenship in Assam: Firstly, those who immigrated before 1971 from Pakistan, including East Pakistan, or were born in India prior to 4 December 2004 would qualify (provided that those born between 1 July 1987 and 3 December 2004 had at least one parent who was an Indian citizen; and the other for those born after 3 December 2004, but provided that both parents are citizens or, at very least, neither parent being illegal migrant.

But with several clauses mentioned in it being implemented sketchily, or not at all, the issue smouldered along ethnic, religious and geographical lines for decades and flared again when the Supreme Court struck down the amended IMDT in 2005. The Manmohan Singh government intervened to arrive, in 2013, on a definition of the contours of the NRC. A team-of which bureaucrat Prateek Hajela, once deputy commissioner of Nagaon district, was appointed state coordinator for the NRC-then set about designing and developing this register.

After seventeen rounds of tortuous negotiation, the NRC was to produce in 2018 a draft list seeking to deprive more than four million, mostly Muslim individuals of their citizenship. This was sought to be modulated with a Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which on becoming law would give citizenship to Hindus and other religious groups who had illegally immigrated from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, but pointedly excluded Muslims.

Already the process had been mortally compromised by Section 3(3) of the Schedule to Rule 4A(4) of the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003, in defining 'persons who are originally inhabitants of the State of Assam' as being eligible for inclusion in the NRC, but provided no definition or procedure for identifying such persons. The Supreme Court interpreted this arbitrarily to mean Assamese-speaking persons and indigenous tribes. Without 'further proof or inquiry, all such persons were included in the draft NRC.15 Although the apex court in this order decreed a two-step process of 'exhaustive' and 'thorough' verification for applicants deemed non-original, it refused to provide directions on a definition or procedure to determine who the original inhabitants of Assam might be.

According to Section 3(2) of the Schedule to Rule 4A(4), persons declared illegal migrants or foreigners were ineligible for inclusion in the NRC, whereas those who entered Assam after 1966 and before 25 March 1971 (and registered themselves and have not been declared foreigners) were eligible. So without a definition of original inhabitants, non-Assamese-speaking persons resident in Assam legally even before 1966, besides others eligible under Section 3(2), became categorised as non-original, effectively ensuring their exclusion. There was no redress.

Among the first reactions to the 1985 accord was the Bodo Sahitya Sabha campaigning for the creation of a union territory of the Bodo regions outside Assam. The Bodo are a tribal community concentrated in Kokrajhar district of the state.

Source: Image

They are also the oldest-settled community in Assam's Brahmaputra valley, having introduced wetland rice cultivation and weaving, thus fitting neatly into Weiner's definition of sons of the soil. In the late 1980s, when Upendranath Brahma became president of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), he led the entire movement with diatribes against 'Assamese chauvinism.

Rajiv Gandhi's government, however, took no notice. In 1987, the ABSU held a big rally in Guwahati with a ninety-two-point programme, and upon returning home, one group of Bodo was violently attacked by a group of Assamese youth, with one death.17 In 1989, after a bout of ethnic violence, the ABSU formed a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) that was to become the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and finally, the Bodoland Territorial Autonomous District Council (BTADC), which was able to procure for the Council legal autonomy for social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural matters.

But then the aboriginal Koch-Rajbongshi population, located mostly within what had become Bodoland, staged a protest demanding their right to self-determination. Claiming in a press conference of 1993 that of the 1.8 million people living in the proposed area to be covered by the BAC, 1.2 million are Koch-Rajbongshi. Phani Medhi, president of the Koch-Rajbongshi Kshatriya Sanmilani, declared that now their fate was 'at the mercy of the Bodo leaders in the name of geographical contiguity of the BAC 218 In fact, the Koch-Rajbongshis constituted no more than 14 per cent of the territory.

Ironically, the largest single ethnic group in the BTADC was Bengali, both Hindu and Muslim, as I was to discover when I was chair of the National Commission for Minorities in 2012 and Kokrajhar was riven with sectarian violence that led to widespread emigration of the Bengali peasantry, adding to Assam's displaced population.

Other Bodo organisations argued about getting as yet excluded villages into the zone of the BTADC, setting in train a never-ending set of autonomy demands. In Assam, these demands weren't only from the Assamese, Bodo and Koch-Rajbongshi. The Nagas pressed for Nagaland and other tribal groups did similarly. "The Assamese efforts to assimilate non-Assamese into their political and cultural framework has thus largely resulted in the breakup of Assam into discrete cultural-political units, writes Weiner.

In June 1986 came the Mizoram Accord, seeking to bring to a close the Christian Mizo tribal community's insurgency that had persisted since 1966.

Source: Image

Mizoram, the furthest south of India's north-eastern states often termed the seven sisters, carved out of the state of Assam in 1972, is bounded today within India by the states of Tripura, Assam and Manipur, and is nestled along the international boundary with Myanmar and Bangladesh.

Before the onset of the British Raj, the area was a scattering of Mizo tribes in autonomous settlements or ram (literally 'land') each ruled by a tribal chieftain in gerontocratic Mizo society under the nominal aegis of the rajas of Manipur, Tripura and today's Myanmar. Their agriculture was reliant on slash-and-burn, locally called jhum cultivation.

Source: Image

Head-hunting was practised, involving ambush, taking slaves and decapitating fighters from the enemy tribe with heads displayed on pikes at the entrance to the ram. This practice brought them into hostility in the 1840s with the British, who in their classic form of conquest began using internal conflict, in this case, the Thadou tribe against the dominant Lusei, to further their imperial interest, bringing what is termed the 'First British Invasion' in 1850 with the burning down of a Lusei village of 800 tribal houses and freeing 400 Thadou captives.

So riven, the Mizo Hills formally became a part of British India in 1895. The northern and southern Mizo Hills became the Lushai Hills, headquartered in Aizawl, in what remained until Independence an 'Excluded Area' within the state of Assam. With the British came Christian missionaries winning the animist Mizo to Christianity by the first half of the twentieth century. Thanks to this, Mizoram was, on acquiring statehood, to be among the few states of India with universal literacy.

Upon Independence, the number of tribal chiefs was more than 200. In response to a popular campaign by the increasingly educated youth, the hereditary rights of the 259 chieftains were abolished under the Assam-Lushai District (Acquisition of Chief's Rights') Act, 1954.

Village courts were reinstated. But the peripheries of the northeast were unsettled by the challenges of the sons of the soil. A famine of 1959-60 known as the mautam and its handling by the state government gave birth to the Mizo National Famine Front, which morphed into a new political organisation, the Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1961. Protests that followed culminated into armed insurgency with the MNF seeking independence from India. Between 1966 and 1986, the insurgency took the lives of fifteen policemen.

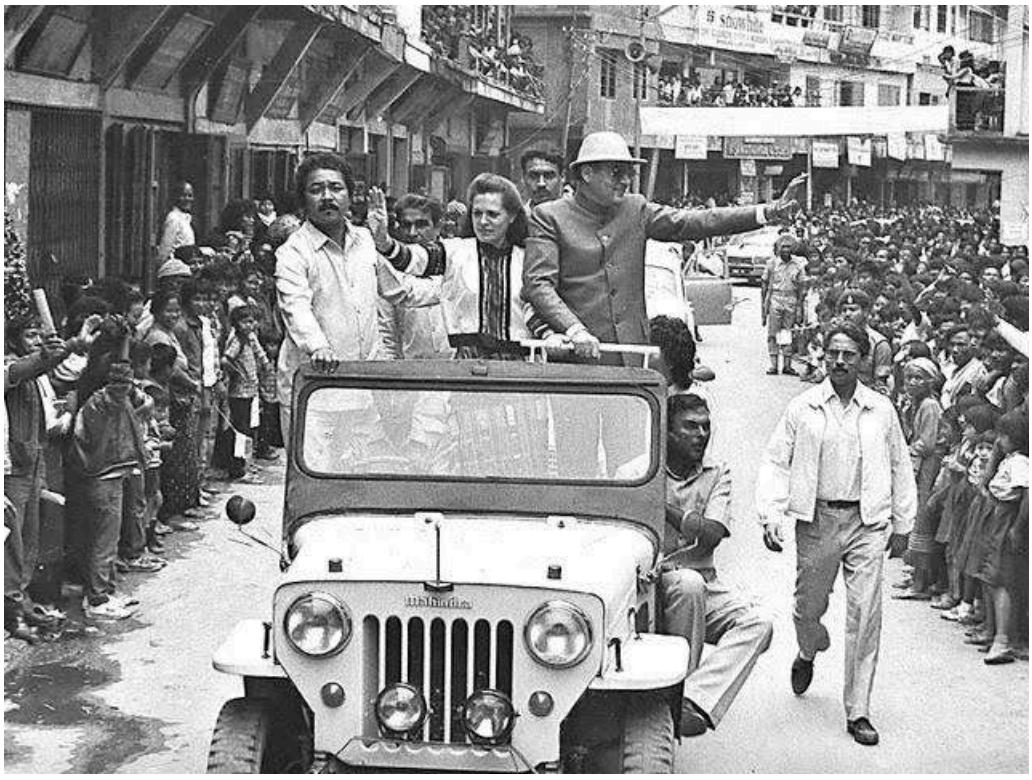
In 1971, Indira Gandhi's government converted the Mizo Hills into a union territory, which came into being as Mizoram in 1972. I was part of Mrs Gandhi's escort when she visited Mizoram in 1984. A.K. Babbar of the Indian Police Service-who had been one of what were termed as the dadas (roughnecks) at St Stephen's, and my senior in college-was the inspector general of police.

Taciturn as always, Babbar had been instrumental in bringing the separatists to the negotiating table, for which I fear he was never officially recognised except for a police medal for meritorious service when he was DIG in 1977. By the time the PM opened her election campaign, it was clear that an agreement was imminent. Mizo electioneering is certainly the most beautiful in India and possibly anywhere, as it is conducted through song.

So, at every corner of Aizawl, as Indira Gandhi swept through in her campaign, she was confronted by song in the tinkling voice of Mizo maidens who are surely India's most beautiful women. They were even then the most educated. I remember on passing an opposition group in trill on the roadside, remarking to Lal Thanhawla who was sometimes with me in the escort vehicle, on the beautiful tenor of the campaign, although the Mizo language was beyond me. 'Yes, he sniffed, 'but what they are saying is not so beautiful!'

In 1984, the Congress party swept the union territory elections and Thanhawla became the chief minister, to so remain for the next two years. On 30 June 1986, a peace accord was signed by Rajiv's government, the government of the union territory of Mizoram and the MNF led by Pu Laldenga.

And on 20 February 1987, the new Mizoram state took birth as the twenty-third in the Indian Union, with special provision under Article 371-G of the Indian Constitution to safeguard and protect the customs, religion and social life and practice of the Mizo, with Mizoram given two seats in Parliament, one each in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Thanhawla stepped down and Laldenga became the interim and the first chief minister of the fledgling state.



Source: Image

The accord made Mizoram an island of tranquillity but the Mizo, a people of legendary hospitality, were jealous of the ethnic Mizo character of their state. The Bru who were settled there, a tribal community primarily Hindu and Buddhist, were excluded and harassed.

The Congress in the meantime returned to power after elections in 1989 and 1993, led both times by Thanhawla, who served as chief minister well into the twenty-first century, making him the longest-serving chief minister in Mizoram's history despite a setback in the election of 1998 only to return triumphant thereafter.

Campaigning for his party in the elections to the state assembly in November 2018, which the Congress lost, Rahul Gandhi recalled speeding around Mizoram in 1987, his father at the wheel.

These were among the whirl of speedy drives that Rajiv undertook on tours across the countryside in his Jonga, and like many others, I followed, accompanied by his doctor, in this case Dr Sahai, who had replaced the long-serving and devoted Dr K.P. Mathur.

Rajiv would tell us how much of his time was spent in keeping Rahul and Priyanka from tearing each others' eyes out. How he did that and drive at the speed at which he did must surely have had more to do with his lady than with him. Dr Sahai and I caught up on our sleep. Yet, Rajiv actually used his time in the countryside to question, to study and to learn, all of which went into policymaking to ensure it remained rooted in real needs.

Indranil Banerjie of India Today has given us a poignant account of the MNF's return to the fold. Parva, an isolated cluster of tiny villages on the southern tip of Mizoram, became the reception point for returning Mizo guerrillas.

All Parva had seen for years was the routine patrolling of armed security men, but for a few days ending 26 July 1986, it was transformed into a melee of government officials, soldiers, camera crews and journalists' awaiting the trickle of returning guerrillas accompanied by ninety-two children and forty-four women. They had trekked for two and a half days, and were led by MNF vice president, Zoramthanga, through the muddy leech-infested undergrowth crawling with snakes.

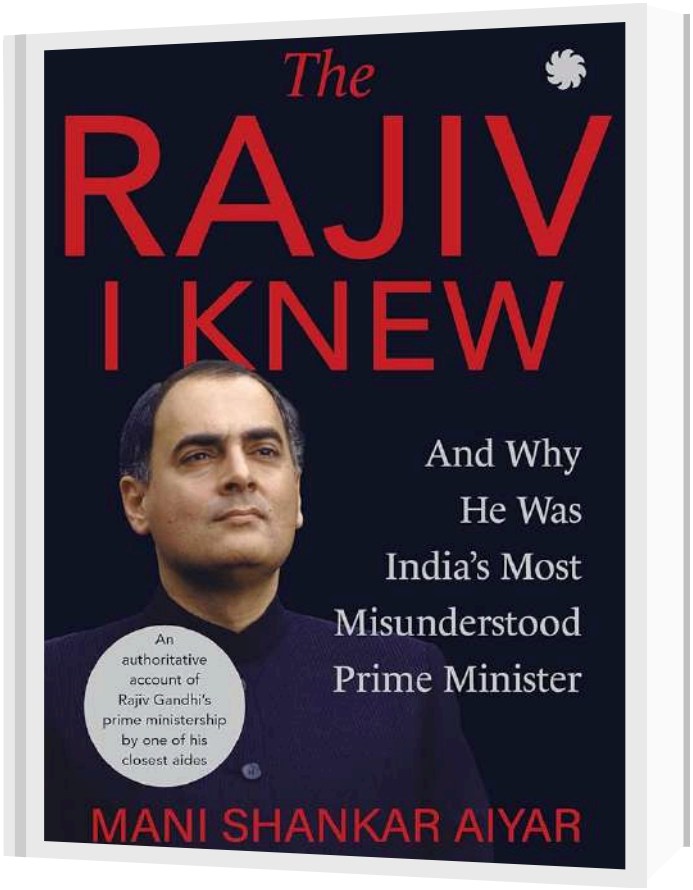
Many had brought their pets-parrots, dogs and even a tame hawk-apart from their other possessions and reminders of jungle life. Many became emotional on parting with their weapons, most of which were old, rusty 303 carbines. 'These were the weapons by which we lived and died for the last 20 years,' said 'Lieutenant' Anthony Vanlaltlunga, and giving them up was like leaving a faithful lover.

So emotionally devastated were they by the act of surrendering their guns that, 'many of them wept and shouted without knowing what they were doing when they had to deposit their arms, said Laldenga.

The items collected included 216 guns, more than 20,000 rounds of ammunition, 117 items of explosives and two wireless sets. And so, the tragic times that began long ago in 1966 came to a close amid prayers and a peal of church bells. As I write this, the MNF governs Mizoram once more.

3) Book review of “The Rajiv I Knew” by Mani Shankar Aiyar

Meera Shankar



Source: Image

Mani Shankar Aiyer’s “The Rajiv I knew” is a labour of love to set the record straight on India’s “most misunderstood Prime Minister”.

A close aide of Rajiv Gandhi who oversaw his domestic tours and his principal speech writer, Mani clarifies that, apart from Panchayat Raj and Apna Utsavs, he played no role in policy.

Mani, however, brings to bear a wealth of personal experience to shine a light on Rajiv Gandhi’s Prime Ministership, backing it with wide and solid research, a keen intelligence, persuasive arguments and occasional flashes of the wit for which he is known.

This is a serious book which makes a convincing case for a reassessment of Rajiv’s leadership. His term began with the largest electoral victory in independent India but, later, became mired in controversies which drowned out and obscured his many forward-looking initiatives.

These sought to heal political schisms, find solutions to violent conflicts, deepen grassroots democracy and propel India into the modern technological age.

3.1 Accords at home

Thrust into Prime Ministership in tragic circumstances and with little political experience, Rajiv brought a fresh perspective to bear on India's problems of national integration. With the confidence of youth he believed that, given reason, goodwill and political accommodation, solutions could be found to democratically and peacefully end violent internal conflicts in Punjab, Assam, Mizoram and J&K.

The various Accords that he signed were a serious effort to address issues which had alienated sections of opinion within these states. Some of the Accords unravelled during implementation and could not be sustained.

In Punjab, for instance, the provisions of the Rajiv-Longowal Accord signed in 1985 remained a dead letter and, eventually, peace was restored by the crackdown by KPS Gill and the Punjab Police.

Despite the difficulties in implementing the Punjab Accord, Mani points out that Rajiv's consistent actions, including the release of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal in January 1985, the signing of the Punjab Accord in July 1985, the holding of elections in September 1985, conceiving and executing Operation Black Thunder II which flushed out terrorists from the Golden Temple without casualties and his many fearless tours of the State changed the political atmosphere, helped restore government authority and set the stage for gradual restoration of normalcy.

Source: Image

A month later in 1985 the Assam Accord was concluded. Rajiv charged Home Secretary, RD Pradhan, to bring the All Assam Student Union to the negotiating table with the assurance that any agreement reached would be put to the test in free and fair elections, even if that resulted in a premature end of the Congress government. This brought about a sea change.

As Prafulla Mohanta and other student leaders of the AASU "took charge of the State Government, the violence that they had engendered petered out. The North East returned to the national fold…"

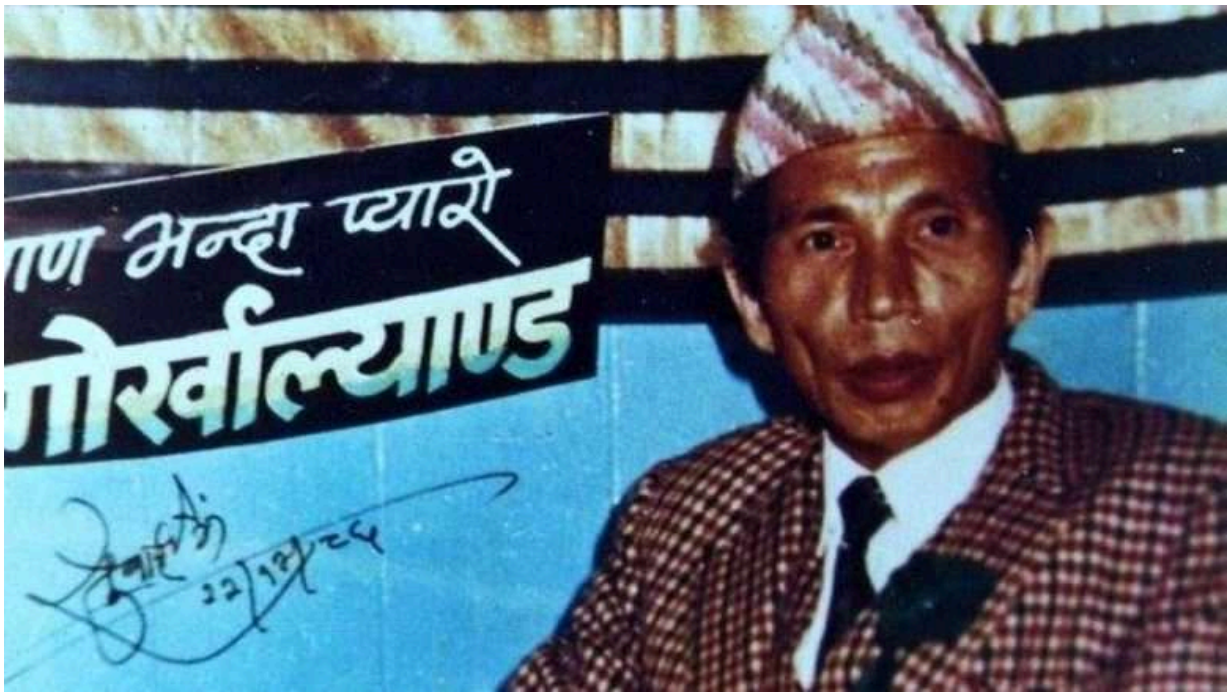
The Mizoram Accord, much of which had been negotiated earlier by G Parthasarthi under Indira Gandhi, was clinched under Rajiv and was, perhaps, his most successful Accord. Mizoram had seen one of the longest insurgencies in India, beginning in 1966.

The situation was complicated by Mizoram being a border state which shared borders with East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) and Myanmar, enabling the insurgents to slip in and out and to avail of ready support from the Pakistan Army.

As part of the political settlement in Mizoram, Laldenga's Mizo National Front was persuaded to lay down arms in return for the Centre handing over the post of Chief Minister to Laldenga and getting the Congress' duly elected leader, Lalthanhawla to step down and become Deputy Chief Minister.

Since then, the MNF and Congress have alternated in power in Mizoram. The former insurgents have embraced the democratic process and, today, Mizoram is the most peaceful state in the North East.

In Darjeeling, the agitation for a separate Gorkhaland was successfully brought to an end in 1988 with the setting up of a semi-autonomous Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council with Subhash Ghising of the Gorkha Liberation Front as its head.



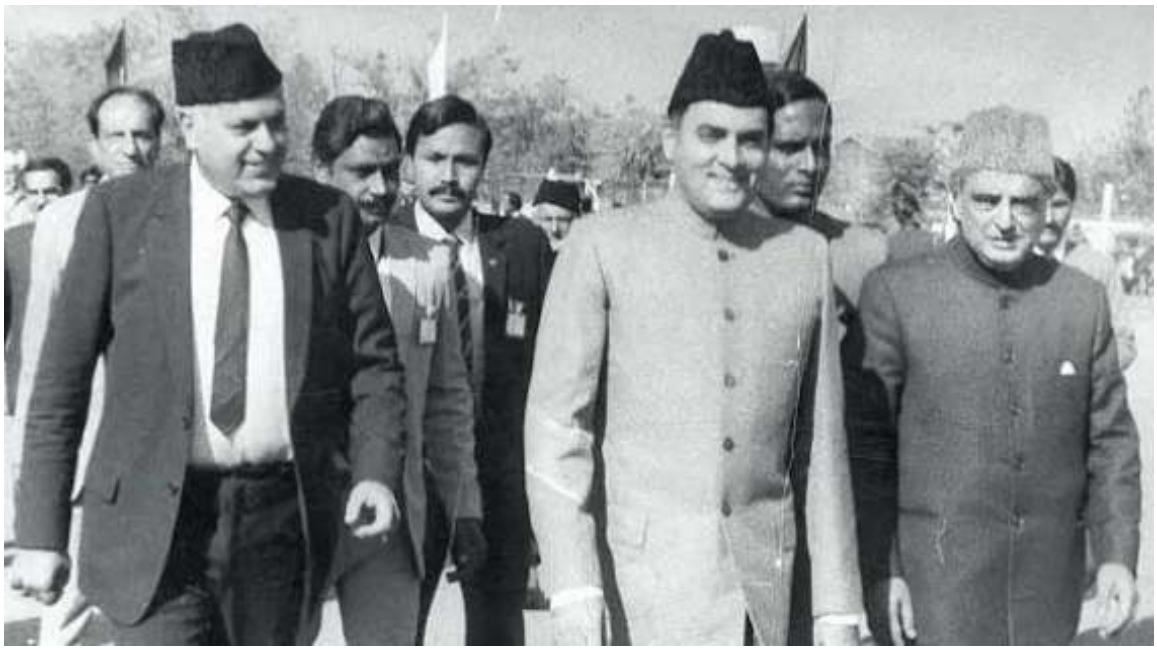
Source: Image

In all these Accords it was Rajiv's statesmanship in putting national interest ahead of the Congress party's interest that enabled their successful conclusion. This was not popular within the Congress Party and probably contributed to the split in the Party in 1989 with the defection of Arun Nehru, Arif Mohammed Khan and some other Congressmen to the VP Singh camp.

Mani wonders whether Rajiv was being politically naïve in his approach but answers that Rajiv did not believe that the purpose of leadership must be to cling on to power at any cost. Rather, he saw his role as being above narrow, partisan interests and acting in the larger interest of the nation. Nor did Rajiv view dissidents as enemies, but as potential partners in nation building.

In J&K, the picture was more complex as the winding down of the conflict in Afghanistan with the easy availability of well trained and armed jehadis who could be diverted to Kashmir by Pakistan and missteps by Governor Jagmohan presaged turbulent times.

It had begun well with the conclusion of an alliance between Farooq Abdullah's National Conference and the Rajiv Gandhi led Indian National Congress in November 1986. This was underpinned by a huge thrust to economic and infrastructure development in the State. The alliance won 64 seats in the Assembly in March 1987, while the opposition Muslim United Front won only 4 seats.



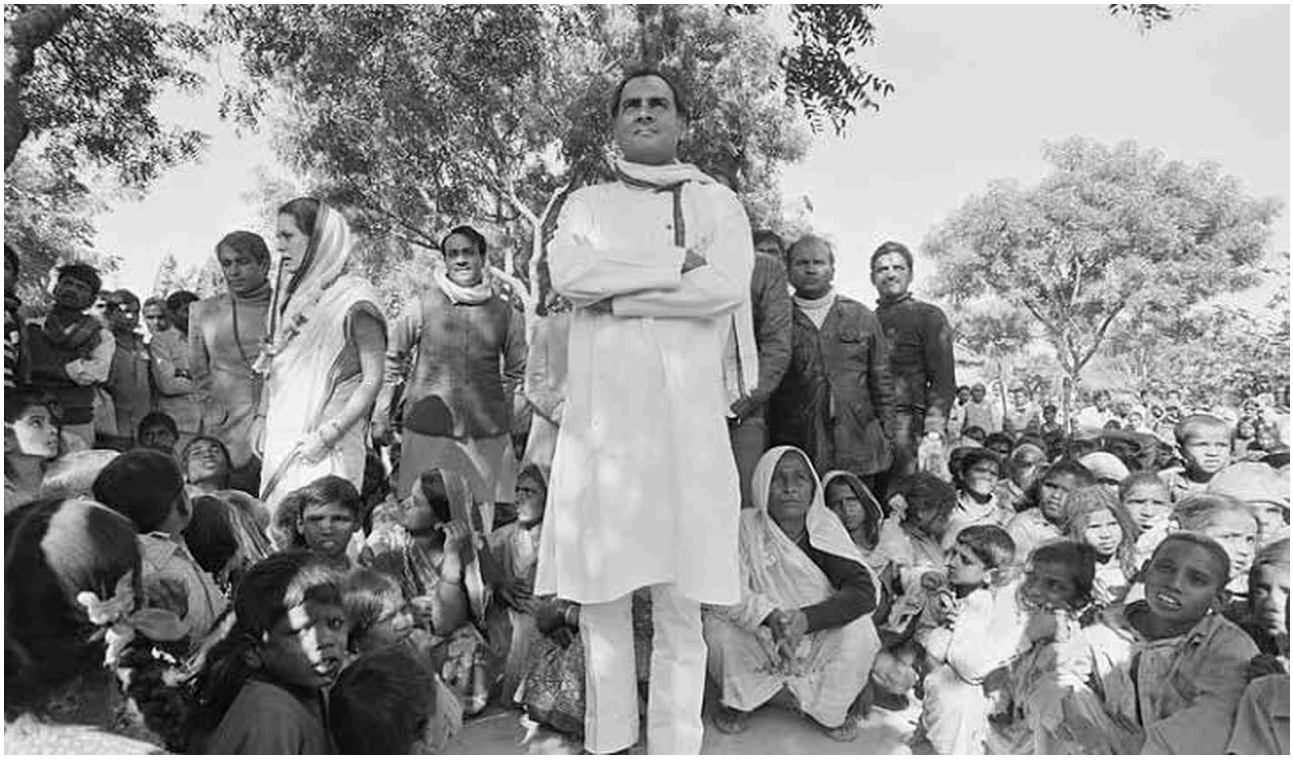
Source: Image

The election was, however, dogged by rumours of rigging. Mani cites Wajahat Habibullah, who was posted in J&K at that time, who has assessed that rigging may indeed have occurred in some 10 seats that were won by the National Conference, but this did not change the overall alliance victory. While there may have been discontent simmering in the Kashmir Valley, on the surface the situation was normal with the government firmly in control. Indeed, a record number of tourists visited J&K in the autumn of 1989.

The mishandling of the kidnapping, by Kashmiri extremists, of the Home Minister's daughter under the VP Singh government and the reappointment of Jagmohan as Governor, despite his known prejudices, caused the situation to unravel. Farooq Abdullah resigned as Chief Minister over Jagmohan's appointment. Jagmohan dissolved the State Assembly, possibly without even consulting the Central Government. The State plunged into a period of dark turmoil with Jagmohan's efforts to delegitimise the National Conference and the Congress Party and promote the separatist JKLF.

The panic induced exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits, encouraged by Jagmohan, the strife torn years of terrorism which targeted people of all faiths followed. (Mani quotes a reply to an RTI query by the Deputy Superintendent of Police of Srinagar that " since the inception of militancy in the 1990s " the total number of Kashmiri Pandits killed is 89, compared to the killing of people of other faiths, mainly Muslim, which stands at 1,635). The communal colour sought to be given to the conflict is, as Mani puts it "ahistorical". Mani, perhaps, underestimates the impact of Pakistan's efforts to communalise the situation.

3.2 Panchayat Raj



Source: Image

One of Rajiv's signal achievements (and for Mani a personal crusade) and his most transformative contribution was the evolution of Panchayat Raj. Democracy to be meaningful has to be, essentially, local. However, our Constitution left a huge gap at the local level after the two tiers of governance at the Centre and the States.

Panchayat Raj was brought into the State List in November 1948 and included only in the non-binding Directive Principles of the Constitution. While Nehru eventually realised that without a democratic administration at the grass roots implementation of government plans would falter and prepared a model law to be passed by state legislatures in 1959, the initiative petered out after his death. In 1986 Rajiv introduced the idea of moving amendments to the Constitution and thereby giving Panchayat Raj Constitutional status.

Initially, Rajiv believed that better delivery of government programmes was a question of better management practices. Later, however, he was convinced that democratic empowerment at the grass roots was key to more responsible governance.

Mani details the exhaustive process of debate and consultation initiated by Rajiv Gandhi leading up to the 73rd amendments to the Constitution. To address concerns of "elite capture" of local bodies, novel provisions were incorporated for broad basing representation through reserving 33% of seats in the Panchayats and Municipal bodies for women.

This was a truly revolutionary move which empowered 1.4 million women to play a role in the democratic process. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes would also be represented in proportion to their population. Tribal majority states, such as Nagaland, were exempted so that their own systems of tribal governance could continue.

The legislation provided for regular, timely elections to Panchayats through State Election Commissions, with devolved powers in respect of planning, economic development and social justice. Law and order would continue to vest in the District Magistrate. Similar provisions were made in respect of Municipal bodies, with some modifications.

The draft Bill was introduced by Rajiv Gandhi in the Lok Sabha on 15th May 1989, but the debate was clouded by the leakage of the CAG report on the acquisition of the Bofors gun with the opposition walking out. This made for easy passage in the Lok Sabha, but in the Rajya Sabha it fell short by a few votes.

Rajiv decided to make Panchayat Raj a key plank of his election platform. For Mani, personally, his passionate involvement with the evolution of Panchayat Raj was the trigger which prompted his resignation from the Indian Foreign Service and his embrace of a career in politics.

After Rajiv's death, Mani continued his personal championing of Panchayat Raj till the passage of the Panchayat Raj Bill in 1992, a year after Rajiv's assassination.

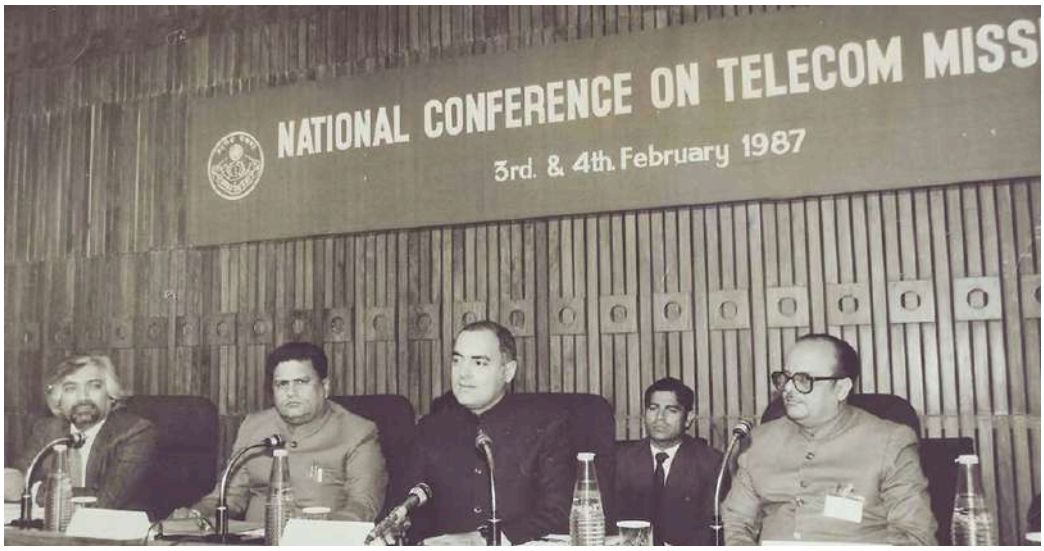
How successful has Panchayati Raj been? Mani underlines that we now have 260,000 democratically elected units of local self-government with some 3.2 million representatives. Almost 1.4 million of these are women, some 100,000 of whom are Chairpersons or Vice Chairpersons. About 650,000 lakhs are from the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes.

The Amendments have, therefore, truly revolutionised the broadening of democratic participation at the grass roots and ensured the unprecedented inclusion of marginalised groups. They have, however, been hobbled by the reluctance of State Governments to devolve financial resources and powers.

Safeguards to address concerns that Panchayat Raj does not become Sarpanch raj have also proved inadequate. Hopefully these weaknesses will be addressed by future governments so that inclusive, responsible and accountable democracy comes to inform local governance.

Source: Image

3.3 Technology missions



Source: Image

Rajiv understood the importance of technology in the modern age. He believed that the focussed application of technology could help address many issues of India's economic and social development.

His Technology Missions which sought to harness the power of technology for solving everyday problems of health, communication, safe drinking water and nutrition, were innovations at that time. Drinking water, immunisation, edible oils, the telecom network and dairy development were the focus of the Technology Missions, leading to major advances in some of these sectors, such as dairy development, immunisation and telecom. Others, such as the oil seeds Mission did not make the progress expected.

There were also S&T projects in Mission mode on a range of issues, including adult literacy, goitre control, weather forecasting, development of amorphous silicon solar cell technology, integrated vector control of vector borne diseases and rehabilitation of the handicapped. Rajiv's emphasis on computerisation drew some media derision and I recall a cartoon showing a bullock cart which lampooned Rajiv for promoting "computers in the age of bullock carts!" It is Rajiv who has had the last laugh here, as information technology and software services have come to be key drivers of growth in the Indian economy. Of course, bullock carts have not vanished, though they have become much fewer. And this highlights the challenges which still remain for India's development.

3.4 Foreign policy

In the field of Foreign Policy, two major initiatives stand out, breaking new ground with China and Pakistan. At the start of his term, Rajiv Gandhi had tasked Additional Secretary Gopi Arora and Parliamentary Secretary Arun Singh to take a fresh look at India's relations with China. These efforts had been in the offing since Indira Gandhi's re-election in 1980. In 1983, she had received an invitation from Deng Xiaoping to visit China.

The preparations for this visit were reset when Rajiv became Prime Minister. The thaw in the Soviet Union's relations with China and the joint demarcation of the disputed boundary between the two countries added fresh impetus to our efforts. But the discovery of permanent structures built by China in the Sumdorong Chu Valley in 1986 brought fresh tensions. Rajiv approved a military riposte by our troops outflanking the Chinese and occupying the Hathungla Ridge.

He also conferred full statehood on Arunachal Pradesh in December 1986. The State was formally inaugurated in February 1987. A heavy build up of troops took place on both sides of the border as the snow thawed. However tensions eased with the visit of the Raksha Mantri and External Affairs Ministers in quick succession in April/ May 1987 to Beijing. By mid-1987 preparations for Rajiv's visit were back on track.

With Pakistan, Rajiv made a concerted effort to improve ties, meeting with Zia-ul-Haq six times in his first year. While Mani maintains that Zia was sincere in seeking better ties with India, he underestimates that Pakistan's transformation into a front-line state in the jehad against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, its support to militancy in Punjab and J&K, and its clandestine efforts to acquire nuclear weapons adversely impacted Zia's credibility and injected a note of caution in our dealings with Pakistan.

Source: Image

Rajiv visited Pakistan again the following year in July 1989. In the meanwhile back-channel discussions on Siachin had made progress but fell through as Rajiv was out of office within four months and Benazir was removed from office by the Army within two years.

Later, PM Narsimha Rao called off a potential agreement for mapping of ground positions, a mutual pull back of forces and establishment of a demilitarised zone, because of the political shadow of the Babri Masjid dispute.

Mani argues passionately for insulating India-Pakistan relations from domestic and electoral compulsions. But this is easier said than done. The most formidable obstacle remains Pakistan's Army and Security establishment which would have to give up their policy of strategic overreach for stable ties with India.

The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of July 1987 was a sincere effort to find a political solution fair to both the Tamil and Sinhala communities in Sri Lanka.

However, the Accord soon unravelled on the intransigence of Prabhakaran and the LTTE on the one side, and Sinhala chauvinism on the other side which undermined the implementation of the agreement.

Source: Image

An Indian Peace Keeping Force was sent to Sri Lanka at the request of President Jayawardene, but it soon got sucked in to an active fighting role against the LTTE.

Rajiv paid with his life for listening to his advisors who,in my view, did not appreciate that military intervention in an open-ended situation, which did not lend itself to surgical action, would end in failure.

Unlike in Sri Lanka, the military intervention authorised by Rajiv in support of the Maldives government, which was facing a coup by disgruntled expatriate Maldivians, in November 1988 was swift, surgical and successful. Two IAF aircraft were despatched on 4th November 1988 with 300 paratroopers and completed their mission without any casualties.

3.5 Going Nuclear

Source: Image

Rajiv was a staunch advocate of nuclear disarmament. When he was briefed on the infirmities of the Non-Proliferation Treaty which had divided the world into nuclear haves and have nots, and had allowed the nuclear weapon states to proliferate their nuclear arsenals manifold, he sought to know what a fair and acceptable Treaty might look like from our point of view.

This was the genesis of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan for a Nuclear Weapons Free and Non-Violent World. This provided for a phased and time bound elimination of nuclear weapons by the nuclear weapon states by 2010, with an equal and reciprocal commitment by the threshold and non-nuclear weapon states not to cross the nuclear threshold. The plan failed to find traction when it was presented to the Third UN Conference on Disarmament in June,1988.

Meanwhile advances by Pakistan towards nuclear weapons were forcing Rajiv's hand. A Q Khan told Kuldip Nayyar in January 1987 in an interview in the midst of the Brasstacks crisis that Pakistan had the bomb. In March 1987 in an interview to Time magazine Zia said that" Pakistan has the capability to build the bomb whenever it wishes".

After getting a detailed intelligence assessment Rajiv took the difficult decision for Department of Atomic Energy to secretly begin developing nuclear weapons. He did not take the decision to test. Perhaps, we were not fully ready for this at that time.

3.6 Economic policy

Mani does not touch at any length on Rajiv's economic policy. He points out that Rajiv held to the socialist values of a more just and humane society but recognised the need for India to adapt in response to the changing situation. The gradual liberalisation during his term delivered the highest industrial growth rates since independence.

Rajiv was poised to pursue a more determined economic liberalisation had he won. Indeed, it is an irony that Narsimha Rao, the Prime Minister who ushered in economic reforms, was included in the Expert Group on economic policy set up by Rajiv in preparation for the 1991 General Elections, as a representative of the 'old guard' who had to be carried along. This spade work made it easier for Narsimha Rao to undertake the 1991 economic reforms.

3.7 Controversies

Rajiv's term as Prime Minister was dogged by controversies. It began with a blood bath against the Sikh community in retaliation for the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards.

The Home Ministry, headed by Narsimha Rao, and the Delhi Administration did little to stop the rioting. This will, forever, remain a stain on our record as a nation. After his mother's funeral Rajiv took charge and the riots were brought under control.

Some, like Bofors, eventually petered out with no evidence emerging of any payoffs to Rajiv Gandhi or Defence Secretary Bhatnagar despite years of investigating. The Supreme Court finally put an end to the controversy with its judgement of 4 February,2004 in which Justice Kapoor held that no case had been made out despite thirteen years of investigation.

Mani makes a plausible argument, through circumstantial evidence, that the powerful Arun Nehru (MoS Home) had probably orchestrated the Bofors pay-offs behind Rajiv's back and that is why subsequent opposition governments did not pursue the investigations seriously. The ultimate vindication of the purchase of the Bofors gun came in the Kargil conflict when its shoot and scoot capability was critical to India's success.

Others, like the decision on Shah Bano and the subsequent decision to unlock the gates of the Babri Masjid have cast a long shadow on Indian politics, sharpening religious cleavages and pushing politics towards a majoritarian turn.

Mani, quoting Wajahat Habibullah, believes that Rajiv was not consulted when the decision to unlock the gates was taken and that it was, in all likelihood, engineered by Arun Nehru and led to his being dropped from the Cabinet in October 1986.

The subsequent efforts by Rajiv to find a negotiated settlement were soon overshadowed by the General Elections. While the original decision to unlock the Babri Masjid may or may not have been taken with Rajiv's cognisance, he did agree to the subsequent Shilanyas. This alienated the Muslim community and was instrumental in Rajiv's defeat at the hustings. Today, the Congress is still struggling to rebuild itself in the Hindi heartland.

As Prime Minister, Rajiv had little prior experience in the intrigues of Indian politics. Straight forward and confident by nature, Rajiv trusted his advisors to a fault. He did not understand how proximity to or the desire for power changes people and that leadership at the top is, essentially, a lonely place.

What he did strive for with the energy and impatience of youth, was to address India's political cleavages, empower democracy at the grassroots and bring the force of technology to bear on solving problems of India's economic and social development. His was a truly modernising impulse, preparing India for the twenty first century. Mani's book is a must read for anyone seeking a fair assessment of someone who could have become one of India's transformative leaders ,after a stint in the opposition, had he survived.

4) Technology missions

Sam Pitroda [3]

Source: Image

In the August of 1987, the initial three-year period for C-DOT was up. To mark the anniversary, we decided to present a report to the nation at Delhi's big Vigyan Bhawan and give a live demonstration of our telephone exchange to the prime minister and others. We invited 1200 people from all over the country-businessmen, manufacturers, scientists, academics, government ministers, students and all the major media, in addition to Rajiv himself. The C-DOT teams from Delhi and Bangalore provided a live demo and displayed the exchange components and associated hardware we had developed.

I gave a little introduction at the podium. It was outlined in the 'Report to the Nation', as follows:

Mr Prime Minister, distinguished guests, and friends from C-COT, it is a pleasure to present a report to the nation on C-DOT's accomplishments in the last three years. Perhaps someone might be curious to know why, when C-DOT has been an open book right through.

The answer is that this great nation of ours had reposed in us 'super trust' of developing a sophisticated digital telephone switching technology and products on our own from scratch for Rs 36 crores in thirty-six months. Now the question is, how far have we been able to come up to her expectations. Did we size up to it?

The questions posed are as difficult as the answers themselves. But our endeavour would be to answer these queries frankly and honestly for you to judge. According to us, the task was not, and has not been, a simple one, by any yardstick. In fact, for quite some time it was considered to be a great gamble by many.

However, we believe it has proven to be a great initiative on the part of the Indian system to challenge the genius and the drive of our young people.

[3] From: Pitroda, Sam with David Chanoff (2015) Dremaing Big – My Journey to Connect India. Penguin, New Delhi

The Centre for Development of Telematics was established on August 25, 1984 by the government with the following objectives:

- To develop sophisticated telematics technology and products indigenously
- To digitize India's telephone network to improve overall service
- To be prepared for the integrated service digital network of the future

C-DOT is à scientific society funded jointly by the Department of Electronics and the Department of Telecom. The main goal of C-DOT has been to develop accessibility and rural communication with a focus on self-reliance, labour-intensive and capital-sensitive programmes.

At present, C-DOT has 425 people with an average age of 25 years. In Delhi, there are 215 working on software, systems and administration. In Bangalore, there are 210 people working on hardware and production. C-DOT has now developed small, medium and large rural exchanges, private automatic exchanges, and other exchanges for the digital networks.

In spite of all our accomplishments, we still have miles to go. We are conscious of the fact that designing a family of digital switching systems will not solve the telecom problems of India. We need to manufacture, install, maintain and service these systems for a long time to come. We recognize that qualified and dedicated people coupled with management skills to mobilize and motivate their capabilities are the ultimate limitations of development and not capital or technology.

Finally, we would like to thank our families for allowing each one of us to spend long hours at work, the media for fair coverage of our ongoing activities, and all those individuals, organizations and government agencies who have supported us.

Mr Prime Minister, please allow us to say publicly that without your personal involvement from 1981, our dream to build self-reliance in this vital technology of tomorrow as part of the ultimate goal outlined by our founding fathers of an independent India would have remained only a cherished reverie never to be achieved-but only to be deferred, delayed, distracted and dead.

Through your concern, commitment and continuing encouragement, it has been possible to deliver this development to the nation. Mr Prime Minister, thank you for your vision, support and presence.

Then one of the young engineers stood up and made a direct call to a colleague in Bangalore, the two describing and explaining the designs, the products, what they were and how they worked, all in clear layman's terms, for the benefit of everyone in the hall. Then Rajiv spoke for fifteen minutes. He was impressed. Judging from the media accounts the next day, the entire country was impressed. I was proud of my team and very happy.

That was my concluding report on C-DOT, my way of saying: C-DOT is working well and it is on autopilot. This is the product and the process. Everything is on track and being implemented. Our engineers and administrators have the work in hand. Now it was time for me to move on.

It is an understatement to say that I was acutely aware of what my relationship with Rajiv Gandhi meant, not just in terms of the opportunities it gave me but also personally. I treasured that bond. His thoughtfulness towards me and, equally, towards Anu, was something that touched both of us deeply.

I started commuting to India in 1981, but decided to move my family there in 1985. Of course, doing that meant uprooting them, which gave me a deep feeling of anxiety. Salil was ten, Rajal seven. They had been born in Chicago, they were enjoying their schools, their family and friends. Chicago was their home. A big move was going to create a major disruption in their lives.

Anu herself hadn't lived in India for about twenty years. How would she feel about moving? I thought that at the very least I had to introduce her to Rajiv, so she could see for herself why I wanted to do this, and could begin getting comfortable with the idea of this transition.

My chance came when Rajiv went to Washington to see President Reagan in June 1985. I didn't have an appointment with him, but I called the Indian ambassador. 'Please tell the PM that I'm going to be in Washington with my wife. We would very much like to meet him.'

The ambassador said, 'There is no way you could do that. His schedule is solidly booked.'

'I understand,' I said. 'But if you would please ask him. Just say that Sam Pitroda would like to see him.'

'Certainly,' said the ambassador. 'I'll tell him.'

Anu and I went to Washington, not having any idea if Rajiv would be able to make the time. Three friends came along with us, Dr Prakash Desai, Rajiv Desai and Dr Divyesh Mehta. We were being tourists and seeing some of the sights, when I heard from the ambassador that Rajiv was free for half an hour- between Caspar Weinberger, the then defence secretary, and George P. Schultz, the then secretary of state. All of us were free to come.

Source: Image

The meeting was at the Indian Embassy. It took us a while to get through the heavy security, and as we walked in I saw Weinberger leaving. When we got to the meeting room, I said, 'Mr Prime Minister, this is Anu.'

'Anu,' he said. 'Welcome. Come, sit here next to me.'

I knew Anu's heart must be racing. This was the prime minister talking to her, charming, good-looking, in such a warm and welcoming manner.

'Anu, I know Sam wants to come to India. I want you to make sure the children's admission to school is taken care of. It's very important, and Sam may not understand these things in Delhi. Let me know. It's essential to get them into the right school.'

He was speaking to Anu in exactly the sort of language she wanted to hear. I couldn't help thinking what a truly exceptional person he was--what an effort he made and how relatable he could be.

Now, as I was finishing up with C-DOT, my relationship with Rajiv had only deepened. He would call me at night sometimes, at ten or ten-thirty. 'Sam, come.' So I would go with Anu to his home and we would talk, just the three of us.

But my personal feelings aside, I knew that my relationship with' the prime minister had more or less given me carte blanche to take on whatever role I thought would make most sense post-C-DOT. I was thinking hard about how to bring technology to bear on India's most pressing problems and what I might do to further that. We had talked about it. I was now beginning to get some clarity on what I wanted to do.

Additionally, I was part of the Scientific Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, chaired by Professor C.N.R. Rao, a world-renowned scientist in the field of super conductivity and materials science.

Other members of the council were Dr Ganguly, Dr Tandon, Dr Mashelkar, Dr Narsimha, Dr Raha and Dr Lavakare-India's most distinguished scientific minds.

These were the people who had spent their lives in research. As a scientist, I wasn't anywhere near as accomplished as them, but I interacted with them regularly, so I was able to learn valuable lessons in agriculture, health, biotechnology, vaccines and other areas from them.

This group was always pushing for more research funds. But they also understood the need to use science and technology for the improvement of society. That was one of the main items on their agenda. What do you do with *all* this knowledge if not help the common man?

Being part of these discussions had helped me refine my ideas on the best ways to use technology to address specific problems. I was just about ready to make a proposal to Rajiv, when one evening I got a call from his principal secretary, Mrs Sarla Grewal. 'Mr Pitroda,' she said, 'can you come over right away? We have an emergency on our hands.'

I was alarmed. 'What's happened?''

'Please,' she said, 'just come.''

When I got to her office, she told me. ''The PM is so angry, he just fired the secretaries of water and agriculture. He exploded at them.'

'What do you mean ''exploded'' at them? Why? What exactly happened?'

"They were reporting to the PM on what they were doing about water and agriculture. He was so furious at their presentation that he fired them both on the spot. This hasn't ever happened that the PM would fire two senior people like this. It will cause huge problems, big disruptions in those departments. I'm sure you can convince him otherwise. Please help.'

That same night I talked with the two department secretaries, effectively, the COOS of their ministries. But they didn't have much to add to what Rajiv's secretary told me. 'We were making the presentation. The PM thought it was really bad quality. He just fired us.'

I called Rajiv's office and told them we'd like forty-eight hours. Would his office please ask him to put the decision on hold for that time? Then I told the secretaries I wanted to meet with them the next day to better understand exactly what the problem was.

We decided to tackle the issue of water. 'We've been asked to ensure adequate water supply for rural India,' the secretary said.

'All right. How much water is needed?'

'Enough. Many places don't have adequate water resources.

What kind of water are you talking about?"

'Water.'

'Let me ask you some questions. Do you know how much water a dog drinks?'

'What? What do you mean?'

'I want to know. How much water does a dog drink, a buffalo, a camel, a cow, a cat, a donkey, a goat? How much do people need for bathing, how much for cooking, washing, drinking? Please get this information-then we'll talk.'

The water secretary had simply not looked at the problem this way. He hadn't broken the issue down into its component parts, which one would imagine would have been the first thing on his agenda. But he and the agriculture secretary were bureaucrats, not specialists.

They didn't get into the details. They were responsible for planning, but they didn't feel that a technical understanding was essential for the planning function, or at least for their function. In their presentation to Rajiv they had shown a kind of feel-good, advertisement-type video on India's water and food production-pretty generalities with little substance.

Rajiv was a nuts-and-bolts kind of guy. I understood how those presentations must have infuriated him. No wonder he had stopped them midway and fired them.

I said, 'Look, if you don't break the problem down, how can you understand how much you need, and for what purposes? You'd require 20 litres per day, 50 litres, how much? And for whom?

There are almost exactly the same number of animals per village as people. You need to know how much water they use, how much the people use. You can't plan without knowing these things. You certainly can't report to the PM without specifics.'

Before long they came back with studies showing hard numbers on water requirement and use in the villages. They needed 30 litres per day per person, 40 litres for cattle.

'Okay,' I said. 'What are the problems? What do you need?'

They ticked off the challenges: Excess iron in the water supplies, excess fluoride, and occurrence of guinea worms coupled with high bacteria counts. They needed water-testing labs, geohydrological surveys, satellite imagery and education programmes.

It wasn't that I knew much, if anything, about any of these issues. I was simply asking questions they hadn't asked themselves before they put together their presentations. A whole new horizon had appeared in front of the officials. There was a lot of technology in water and, of course, in agriculture as well.

So we restructured the presentations together. Forty-eight hours later we sat down with the prime minister. They gave their presentations again, and this time he was happier with them. He took back their dismissals.

Thinking about all this, I concluded that now was really the time to look at not just telecom, but *at* some of the other *areas* I had identified in the paper *I* had done earlier, specifically in terms of where and how technology could most effectively impact development. Which of India's problems were most amenable to generational change, and what kind of organization would it take to accomplish the transformations that might be achieved?

In fact, I was not the first to think along these lines. Several years earlier the national five-year plan had identified more than a dozen areas where science and technology could and should be fruitfully applied to national development. Moreover, the plan had discussed the efficacy of the 'mission' approach to addressing problems, i.e., utilizing special task-driven teams or organizations to accomplish specific goals.

The mission approach would bring management, coordination and motivation to the efforts, which, by their nature, crossed over bureaucratic boundaries.

Providing clean, adequate *water*, for example, involved the health, agriculture and education departments and others at the national, state and local levels. It required bringing scientists and technologists to focus their attention on specific problems.

The fact that there was no guiding, unifying force behind attempts to address these kinds of large problems meant that they typically got bogged down in a haze of territorial confusion and a multiplicity of priorities.

This resulted in a psychology of impotence and somnolence, with little or nothing actually getting accomplished. The mission approach was a potential cure for this malaise.

Even though the five-year plan had established a number of projects to cut through the bureaucratic tangle, they had gone nowhere.

Nobody understood them. Nobody was invested in them or wanted to take responsibility for them. They were, as one commentator said, 'black boxes'. No one knew exactly what was inside them or how they were supposed to work.

But the five-year plan had suggested what the needs were and how they should be addressed. With this as a base, together with Rajiv, I decided that the missions should concentrate on five sectors: Rural drinking water, literacy, immunization, edible oils and telecommunications. Later, we added a sixth: Dairy production.

The National Technology Missions were launched to give new focus to development, where we shift from directing people to empowering them. These were launched in 1986-87, at the initiative of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

The mission approach was required to create a sense of urgency, missionary zeal and infrastructure for technological self-reliance and improved delivery systems. It was also required to provide management focus, improved communication, improved centre-state coordination and organized information to substantially increase people's participation.

The delivery of these basic needs required a unique integrated approach to make use of modern technology and tools to understand grass-root realities and the talent of our young intellectuals, professionals and technocrats.

Source: Image

It also required cooperation between the various agencies, the active participation of women as well as strong political commitment at the state and district level.

To succeed in these missions we needed to rejuvenate our existing institutions, simplify antiquated procedures, decentralize planning, mobilize available national resources, eliminate the duplication of efforts, provide modern management for motivation, mobilization and monitoring, and focus on quality and continuity; there was also a need to bring social auditing by people outside the system, and bring traditional community participation back into our mainstream.

I would come on as adviser to the prime minister for the Technology Missions with a ministerial rank. My overall objective would be to mobilize technology to benefit the people, especially the rural population and those in the sectors we had identified.

In addressing these six areas, I would attempt to integrate technological interventions with government efforts, private industry and volunteer resources. My job would be to coordinate the ministries and galvanize the work already being done.

I would keep everyone involved and focused on goals and timelines. I'd operate independently and bring in new methods of management. All these functions were right up my alley. I wasn't a specialist in any of the mission areas other than telecom, but I could be the catalyst for all of them.

The first requirement was the staff, i.e., a secretary, someone I could rely on as a kind of 'chief of staff. This was going to be a vast job. I had more or less created it for myself and I was ready to tackle it, but I knew I'd need someone with exceptional talents alongside me.

I found that person in Jairam Ramesh, a brilliant young man educated in India and then in the United States at Carnegie Mellon and MIT, specializing in engineering, economics, management and technology policy. Ramesh had been working as an adviser to Abid Husain at the Planning Commission, which had devised the five-year plan. Husain and I were close friends.

He was a colourful man with an open mind, a generous heart and a deep understanding of government institutions. He was a strong supporter of the Technology Missions concept, and generously offered me his advisership. Ramesh personified exactly what *I* needed he wasn't just broadly knowledgeable, but full of ideas, energy, enthusiasm and drive.

Next, I hand-picked the mission directors. The team comprised Gauri Ghosh, Dr Misra, Dr Shenoy, Dr Rao, Dr Randhawa, Mr Narayan, Dr Kurien, secretary of health, Jairam, Dr N. Ravi and myself.

We now had in hand an interesting organizational structure. Each of the mission directors reported to their respective ministers: the immunization director to the health minister, the literacy director to the education minister, the edible oils director to the agriculture minister, and so on.

At the same time, however, their objectives were defined by the Technology Missions, and they were accountable to me as adviser. In this structure one of my jobs was to resolve conflicts. I met regularly with the various national Cabinet ministers and also with the ministers and chief ministers of each state.

My approach was to make sure the ministries got appropriate credit for our accomplishments, which had a beneficial effect all around.

In each of our mission sectors, my sermon was always that technology is an entry point to bring about generational change. Bringing the right technologies to the forefront would allow for radical new approaches to fundamentally transform existing conditions.

In the realm of water, for example, perhaps our most formidable problem was that there were over 100,000 villages without adequate sources of drinking water. Water had traditionally been located in these places mainly by dowsers and water diviners using age-old methods.

Instead, we called in space research experts to provide us with geohydrological mapping so we knew exactly where to drill wells. Our success at finding water sources went up exponentially. At the same time, we had to use technology and build plants to remove excess iron desalination many and fluoride from the water. We also had to build plants to get drinking water from salty seawater.

A large percentage of Indian villages had water sources, but not clean water. We identified 100,000 of these villages and set up testing laboratories in each district. We instituted standards and established treatment facilities. We had over 30,000 villages with guinea worm affecting people's health, and education, training and safe wells were needed to avoid contracting infection through feet in water.

Source: Image

A major challenge was posed by the Mark 4 model water-pump that was used all over India. When these pumps broke down, they often stayed broken because the villages didn't have people with the skills to fix them. Our response to this issue was to print and distribute many thousands of easy-to-understand repair manuals. We knew that when these got the right hands, a huge number of these Mark 4s would stay operational, significantly increasing village water supplies across rural India.

We printed the manuals in each of India's fifteen languages, Gujarati, Bengali, Oriya, Malayali, and the rest. But we had a major problem with distribution. When we shipped the leaflets, we feared the state minister's office might keep 200 of the copies, the secretary might keep 100 and somebody else would keep fifty.

By the time manuals finally reached the right local officials, their number was vastly diminished-only a couple of hundred out of a thousand, not nearly enough. And then we'd face logistical errors such as the Kerala officials being saddled with the Gujarati-language manuals, and the Bengali officials getting the Malayali manuals. It was all simply a mess.

The first challenge for the Mission on Immunization wasn't technological per se, it was infrastructure-, supplies- and decision- making-related. India's record of childhood immunization was abominable. A large percentage of the children had never been immunized against measles/mumps/rubella. But polio was then a much graver problem. In 1987.

India had the largest number of polio patients in the world. Polio vaccines had been around for over thirty years, and we had still not been able to accomplish anything close to universal immunization. It was a national disgrace.

There was one simple bottleneck with regard to the polio issue-an ongoing conflict between those who wanted to use the Sabin oral vaccine and those who favoured the Salk injected vaccine. The two camps of physicians and medical scientists were fighting it out in public. The citizens, of course, had no idea what to think. Everyone was confused, and meanwhile parents lived in fear over their children's health.

Source: Image

When we understood what was going on I called a meeting of seventy of India's top immunization people. Jairam and I met with the assembled experts in Delhi. I told them, 'We have three days. We won't be leaving this place until we can tell the nation what our stand on the polio vaccine is. Are we going to go with oral vaccines, or the injected variety? But we need one voice. I'm not qualified, you are qualified. Now you have to decide.'

Dr Jacob Jones was an expert on vaccines, and he provided the necessary leadership during these difficult discussions. Everyone decided, finally, that oral immunization was preferable. The problem here was that the oral vaccine is a lower-virulence live-virus vaccine, which means it needs to be kept cold during transportation and storage.

It requires what is called 'cold chain' handling, which mandates the use of cold-chain equipment. But how do you get refrigeration into every part of India? So I called a meeting of industrialists at CII (Confederation of Indian Industries). The whole logistics of the cold chain had to be worked out.

And they did work it out. It took time to get everything in place and start immunizing, but the process worked its way through until almost Indian child *had* been immunized. And in 2013, twenty- five years after our intervention, India was finally declared polio-free.

The immunization intervention had other consequences as well. In 1987, when the Technology Missions were launched, India had zero polio-vaccination production capability. I wondered then: How is it that India has the world's largest number of polio patients and perhaps the world's largest population of children with polio, and we don't produce a polio vaccine?

No one had an answer to that, so we did the research and I went to the prime minister. I told him it would cost us up to 300 million dollars to establish proper polio-vaccine production. When he approved the initiative, we sent teams to France and the USSR to study their methods. After that we drew up plans and the government made the investment. In a few years the company that had been established under the science and technology ministry was blending and producing all of India's polio vaccine indigenously.

In fact, some of the problems addressed by the Technology Missions were as much societal as they were specifically technological- immunization, for example, and literacy. These areas often required a driving hand with strong political backing to break logjams and create new procedures.

In a broad sense, creating new processes to solve problems was itself a kind of technology, at least according to my definition. In my view, 'technology' encompassed the design of new production systems as well as breakthroughs or advances in hardware. Technology is not merely a device or a gadget. It is, at its heart, a way to solve a problem, whether it involves software or hardware.

The Mission on Literacy illustrated that. New devices were helpful here. We developed and put into production a solar-powered lantern, so that people in areas without electricity would be able to read and perform all their other functions at night with ease. We designed and produced plastic blackboards that performed much better than the traditional models and didn't use up wood resources. But improving literacy was not primarily technological in that sense. Instead, it had to do with motivating people and providing training and materials-but most especially, it was about motivating people.

Vastly improved literacy (and numeracy) was crucial to India's socio-economic development. But it was also a prodigious challenge. When the Technology Missions got under way the country's literacy rate was at just about 50 per cent. Several hundred million adults were illiterate, the majority of them women.

Source: Image

The question was-What is the best way to attack this? Children were being taught to read in schools, but adult education depended on, first, motivating people to learn and, second, providing teachers and study materials.

With such vast numbers, it was clear to me that some kind of mass mobilization was necessary, which was not something the education department was set up to do.

The plan of action now included launching literacy campaigns throughout the countryside. We set up organizing committees and created a massive volunteer effort. We sent street theatre, acting, circus and music troupes into villages, endeavouring to teach whole populations about the importance of literacy in an entertaining, appealing manner. We wanted them to know what being able to read could mean for people's economic lives and well-being.

With over 2 million committed volunteers, we flooded rural India with information. We set up continuing-education programmes in hundreds of districts. We made tremendous progress. In our initial years we began cutting substantially into the illiteracy rate.

In 1989, two years after we established our campaigns, the Technology Mission on Literacy was awarded UNESCO's coveted Noma Literacy Prize. After the first year we understood a good deal about how to communicate to people the importance of literacy, and also how to teach reading to adults. At that point we began exploring how to grow and sustain these efforts.

The Edible Oils Mission was one programme where the primary motivation was economic. India had paid 1 billion dollars for imported cooking oils over the previous five years, even though there were significant areas of arable land suited for the domestic production of oil crops-soybeans, rapeseed, mustard seed and others.

But Indian farmers weren't growing them. Instead, they were planting wheat, rice and other crops that gave them higher monetary returns. This situation, characterized by unfavourable economics for farmers, was partly due to the fact that the oil industry was controlled by a small number of powerful families and by the exploitative activities of multinational oil interests.

Source: Image

To reverse this situation I called on Dr Verghese Kurien, a legendary figure in the Indian dairy industry. Kurien had done his graduate studies in the United States, then had returned to India and become involved, by chance, in the field of milk production. When he started out, India was importing large volumes of milk and milk powder.

By the time I talked to him about the Technology Missions, he had turned the domestic dairy industry around to the point where India was exporting instead of importing milk. He had created a revolution. Under his guidance, some years later, India became the world's largest milk producer, surpassing the United States.

Kurien was known globally as the 'Father of the White Revolution'. He had created this near-miraculous turnaround by organizing farmers into large co-ops that could exert significant leverage on costs and prices, making milk production profitable for the small farmer.

Kurien was a straight-talking, take-no-prisoners kind of individual, capable of running roughshod over political and industry obstruction. He simply would not sit still and watch while large interests exploited the Indian farmer. Over time he had become an ally and a good friend. When I asked if he would join in on our effort on edible oils, he agreed.

Our challenge in this sector was to create an environment where small Indian farmers would see the advantages of planting oilseed crops. That meant restructuring the marketing system and making improvements in crop technologies. Kurien brought in some of the same methods he used to revolutionize the dairy industry: cooperative production and marketing, adherence to standards, support for individual farmers and protection against unethical competition.

Kurien was head of the National Dairy Development Board, which was sitting on large cash reserves. When it was announced that the board was going to throw its weight behind the intervention on oil, the market panicked. Kurien, the Cabinet secretary and I would meet regularly to decide how much oil we would buy and at what price. When that was announced, the market would adjust to our figure, to the benefit of the small farmers.

Source: Image

By 1990, instead of importing oil, India was exporting oilcakes at the rate of 600 million dollars a year. The turnaround was all due to applying appropriate management methods, understanding and information, and giving small farmers a little bit of support. 'We move into areas where there is gross exploitation,' Kurien told one interviewer, 'and try to restructure the marketing system so that the small producer is not fleeced by middlemen or oil kings.'

When we started working on the oilseed mission, Kurien suggested that it would be a good idea to have a mission on milk as well. He had turned the dairy market around through the massive reorganization of producers, but milk production itself had plateaued.

A mission on dairy could mobilize the application of technologies to improve breeding, animal health and fodder production.

We could significantly enhance milk production. When we launched this mission Kurien invited me to his centre, where I met with 4000 dairy farmers. This was a man who operated on a scale that others could hardly dream of, but which was necessary if you wanted to fundamentally change Indian conditions.

So now we had six missions supported fully by the prime minister. As the missions got under way, all six mission directors-Jairam, myself and a couple of staff-started our crazy, hectic travels as a group. Jairam was my biggest asset. We went to a different state every week. The state's chief minister would be waiting.

We'd meet with him and the heads of his departments to go through the missions one by one: What was happening in this state on drinking water, literacy, immunization, telecom, oils and dairy? Then we'd hold a press conference. With the chief minister sitting next to me, I'd announce where we were and what we were going to do.

Going public like this meant that everyone was aware of the projects we were undertaking and of our timelines for accomplishing them. This meant operating under scrutiny, with complete transparency and accountability. It meant that the state ministers were publicly associated with these projects and, along with us, would be seen as accountable.

This was a new thing for the local governments-somebody from the prime minister's office coming in to review the situation and making press announcements. The media, of course, loved it and lapped it all up. And nobody could say no, because the prime minister was fully committed to the cause. All the chief ministers and other political bosses were very supportive of the Technology Missions and other initiatives of the Rajiv Gandhi government.

As the Technology Missions work advanced, the UN became aware of what we were doing. The concept of the missions seemed something that might be beneficial to development in other nations as well, and the UN convened a meeting on the subject in Poland.

I travelled to Warsaw for this and gave a series of talks, emphasizing on technology as the entry point for widespread development. The upshot of this was a UN report recommending every developing country to consider implementing the Technology Mission concept.

However, not all of our Technology Missions work was successful. We made an important impact in our six established areas-water, immunization, oilseeds, literacy, telecommunications and dairy. But my attempts to expand the missions to include environment, housing, floods and droughts failed to get off the ground.

Prime Minister Gandhi was in favour of the plans, but I found that political problems and conceptual differences among the relevant experts were too knotty to resolve easily. I was simply unable to negotiate the problems within a reasonable time frame. I didn't give up on these, but I put off pursuing them until the point where we might be able to marshal more resources.

The Missions also generated substantial political and media controversy. Of the many projects we undertook, some simply did not work out. Critics would say that they succeeded only 60 or 70 per cent of the time-which *they* deemed a failure and the proof of a mistaken, poorly conceived diversion of government resources.

People take great pride in identifying problems. I always say that you do not need talent to identify problems in India. All you have to do is stand on a street corner and watch the scenes for ten minutes. You will perhaps be able to identify many of the challenges facing India merely in that space.

At times, even the solutions are staring right at you, however, we lack men and women with the domain expertise, leadership, ethics and courage to address these challenges against a potentially hostile bureaucratic environment and multiple odds.

People tend to shift the blame and believe that the problem lies somewhere or with somebody else, as opposed to looking within themselves to introspect and critique. At times, I found that what people think of as important is really not very important, and that what people think of as unimportant is extremely important.

During one of my trips as part of the Technology Missions, we went to a small village in Uttar Pradesh after visiting a local health facility, a school and a biogas plant. We were escorted to a big meeting organized by the head of the village, with almost 300 people in the audience.

In his speech, the village leader started complaining that the village doesn't have a teacher, the doctor doesn't come regularly, electricity is not available, and on and on. When it was my turn to speak, he was basically expecting me to say that I would go back to Delhi and promptly solve all their problems.

As opposed to this, I told them that these were their problems and that in a democracy one need to take charge themselves and begin to solve local problems with local resources. I told them to not await the central government's help to solve every local problem. I expect my speech was not too well-received.

I continually tried hard to explain why I thought this kind of criticism was unjustified. My job, as I saw it, was not to ensure a 100 per cent success-rate. We were in the process of building a nation, not a company that needed to maximize its productivity and returns in order to survive and stay competitive.

Consequently, I wasn't overly concerned if some of our initiatives didn't work out. I could take responsibility when that happened, but ensuring success was not my goal. I was, if anything, more interested in the process than the product. My goal was to set up processes that were more effective than those currently in practice (which so often moved at a glacial pace, or all too often, not at all).

I was more affected and startled by the criticism of some of my friends, Rajni Kothari, for example. Kothari was the founder of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, the person I had consulted when I was first developing the idea for C-DOT.

Source: Image

Kothari, a pre-eminent political theorist, was not happy with technologists who lacked what he thought of as cultural and philosophical depth. He also believed that working in partnership with the government was a waste of time that would, as he said in public, 'tie you [Sam] in knots from which you will find it difficult to liberate yourself. Working in this way would be, he thought, a 'kiss of death'. It was far better, in his opinion, to work from the grass-roots up rather than from the top down.

I thought Kothari was simply mistaken. He and many other leading thinkers were, *at* heart, anti-government people, which is why they made their intellectual homes in the think tanks and institutes. In that regard I had separated myself from them philosophically. I felt with absolute certainty that partnering with the government was the only way to make any real impact on a meaningful scale in *a* nation the size of India.

I felt very strongly that I had found the right niche for myself. I had certain specific skills in technology, in designing systems, in certain forms of management. I was highly driven and wanted to get things done, and I had developed a thick skin and the ability to project confidence, which helped me bring people along with me on the journey.

And through some luck, I had struck up a friendship with Rajiv Gandhi, which allowed me the backing and political will I needed. I also received a great deal of love, affection and support from the media and the public. People were very generous with their praise and appreciated my sincere efforts to help modernize India.

Doing all these things at once-travelling constantly around the country, meeting not just with India's own top leaders but with international personalities as well-was a head rush. I was charged up-there were so many areas where I thought I could make a dent. I knew, too, that time was going to run out at some point, which injected extra urgency into our projects.

I could push this button, push *that* one-and every push could affect a million people, 5 million people. What a romantic thing to do, what a fulfilling thing to do-to make a difference in the fields of education, health, telecom, water and immunization for so many. I didn't know what the future might hold, but for the moment, at least, I had found the right outlet for whatever compulsions were driving me-my need to fix things, my intolerance for political and bureaucratic dysfunction, and my dreams for a more progressive, more humane India.

Source: Image

5) Participatory democracy in Indian political system

G. Palanithurai

The decline of public institutions in terms of their delivery to the poor and the disillusionment of the poor with the public institutions have provided an opportunity to the right wing scholars to raise their voice high on deregulation, reducing public expenditure, reduction of social services and privatization rather than on people's participation in governance, responsiveness of the public institutions to the needs of the poor and more effective forms of democratic state intervention. In this context, the new dispensations, namely, decentralization of power and empowering people have come to occupy the centre stage in the discourse on governance.

Source: Image

5.1 Introduction

Representative democracy is a widely accepted form of governance in the world now. Today more than 50% of the people live under democratically elected governments[1]. Movements are still on to democratize governments and society. It is to be noted that wherever representative democracy has been established as a form of government, still activities are on to democratize the institutions, the organizations and the society.

Further, movements have gained voice to get services from the governing institutions which are under the democratic mode. At the same time it is to be pondered whether the countries which are under democratic governance have delivered the goods to the public and maintained peace and harmony among the social collectivities and regions. If yes, how are these democratic governments able to evolve to cope with the new demands and the new pressures emerging from the social collectivities in the given context? If no, why have not these democratic governments delivered the goods? Where have these democracies derailed? This has to be analysed.

Analyzing a country which is known for its puzzle and paradox will throw ample light on the problems, issues and trends in the process of democracy and development. India being the best case, such an analysis has to be made on Indian polity and democracy.

The analysis of 50 years of democratic governance has brought out the fact that democratic governance has recorded substantial achievements, delivery of goods and services to the privileged, the ruling elites, the middle class and the poor to some extent. But, as for mitigating poverty, maintaining law and order, meeting the basic expectations of the poor, making them participate in the decision making, the government institutions do not have the adequate capacity [2].

There are many questions unaddressed in the development and democracy discourse. Is the development which the state institutions pursue the right kind of course needed for a society like India and is the type of democracy which has been pursued the right kind of democracy to address the issues of the people?

Both the exponents of democracy and of development do not agree with the present trend of achieving development and the present process of democracy. It is unequivocally demonstrated that both are in trouble.

Then what is the alternative arrangement in the orbit of governance? How can the emerging discontented groups be accommodated in the economic activities and in the process of decision-making and how are the development activities to be reframed?

5.2 Ills in governance

Generally governments are shaped and oriented by short term populism, corruption and the self-interest of political elites. Having seen the negative implications of the government actions, international agencies switched over to the market for appropriate solution to the existing problems.

Even the market failed to provide adequate solutions in the areas of inclusion, poverty reduction, environmental protection and public services.

It is not only in India but also throughout the world, both north and south, that citizens speak of mounting disillusionment with the government, based on concerns about corruption, lack of responsiveness to the needs of the poor and the absence of a sense of connection with elected representatives and bureaucrats.

The discontented groups are multiple in number and complex in character and hence a framework should be designed which should have the capability to accommodate the largely varied groups in the system very actively in the economic and political domain.

Further, the system should have the capability to mitigate poverty and reduce corruption, which afflict the society and lead to the emergence of discontented and marginalized groups.

This syndrome prevails in many of the developing countries which have borrowed representative democracy from the west and have not evolved as vibrant democracies by incorporating indigenous characteristics and thereby addressed the major issues of the society.

The whole world is in search of better governance and it becomes a pressing issue for citizens. In many countries people organized public protest movements and they demanded systemic changes in government.

A key challenge now is the construction of new relationships between the citizens and governance[3]. It is unequivocally brought out by the World Development Report (2000-2001) that many poor people around the world perceive large institutions, especially those of the state, to be distant, unaccountable and corrupt. It is further validated and confirmed by other studies that, from the perspective of poor people in the world, there is a crisis in governance[5].

A large number of institutions are involved in ameliorating the conditions of the poor. Yet the poor are excluded from participation in governance. Government institutions and departments are neither responsive nor accountable to the poor. The poor are treated with arrogance and disdain.

Poor people feel that they are helpless and they see little protection against injustice, criminality, abuse and corruption by institutions. Not surprisingly poor men and women lack confidence in state institutions even though they still express their willingness to partner with them in development activities.

People are disillusioned with governments as they are corrupt, non-responsive to the needs of the poor and allow no space for the people to correct them. The above malaise has afflicted all the segments in the world, both developing and developed. Yet another shocking symptom is the weakness or lack of public commitment to local democracy[7].

Source: Image

5.3 In search of solution

Though the ills of representative democratic systems in societies which have feudal thought process were predicted much earlier, the real picture emerged only at the time of the advent of globalization. In many countries measures to bring the government 'closer to the people' through decentralization and devolution have prompted shifts in approaches to service delivery that have widened spaces for citizens' involvement. At the same time the increasing marketization of service delivery in many countries has introduced new roles for those who were formerly the beneficiaries of government services.

Users have come to be seen as 'consumers' or 'clients' and civil society organizations have become significant co-producers of what in the past were largely state functions. It is a dangerous trend that the state is off- loading its larger social responsibilities to private or non-governmental players. It has compounded the problem further.

Service institutions are already non-functional service units in the rural areas. But these units are eating away the public purse yet people do not have any hold over them and as a result they rely on private service agencies by paying money. Poverty stricken people, instead of coming out from poverty trap, are moving into the poverty trap, because of the fact that they have to pay for the services derived from private agencies whether it is for health or for primary education.

In this context, throughout the world, a uniform solution has been found, that is, devolution of powers and development with a theory of subsidiarity. But the nuances of practicing the decentralization process vary from society to society or region to region.

Local conditions determine the nature of decentralization. This new solution is not borrowed from the west like our representative democracy but it is based on the exercise and re-examination of the traditional forms of political representation. While making this exercise it is found that direct democratic mechanisms are increasingly being drawn upon to enable citizens to play a more active role in the decisions which affect their lives.

Here also the question unanswered is: how can the weak and meek move into the corridors of power. This is followed by the efforts to deepen democracy through decentralization of powers from the federal government to local institutions through State governments. Democratic decentralization and participatory governance are in the development discourse due to the growing sense of disillusionment with centralized governance[8].

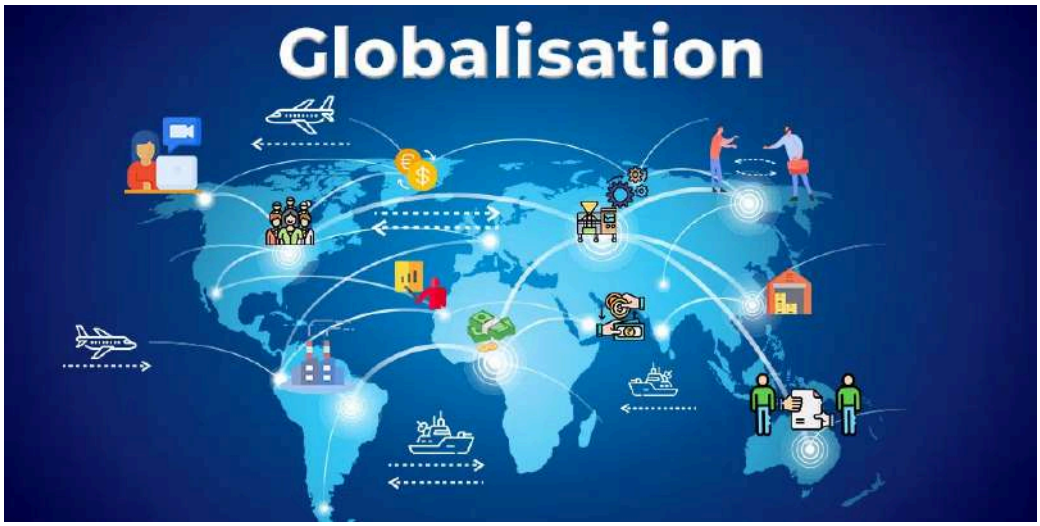
Governance at present is being performed by different agencies at different levels in a widely spread spectrum. It is strongly believed that in a decentralized process of governance the opportunity is wider for people to participate and it provides a wider representation to hitherto marginalized social segments [10]. It is quite significant that movements are on for the deepening of democracy and the decentralization of powers[11].

Source: Image

5.4 The Paradox

Yet another movement is gaining momentum which is called globalization of the economy. Like democratic decentralization, globalization of the economy is also a significant movement in the world [12]. However, this throws up a paradox: while the economy is globalized how can power be decentralized? One should not estimate that globalization will produce positives alone.

Globalization and decentralization will bring opportunities as well as threats and how they are handled by the human collectivities will determine the course of development. As aspiration for democracy and development increases among the people of the world, it is presumed that human collectivities will identify the opportunities and work for prosperity and avoid the threats.



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India has a remarkable record of achievements in socio-political and economic realms and equally in maintaining a relatively stable and competitive democracy in spite of diverse social and economic groups with variegated interests and conditions.

People are dissatisfied with the way our democracy functions. Some even argue that democracy has failed the people. It has come to the stage of declaring that we are incapable of working out democratic institutions.

As proof, they point to the growing criminalization of politics, the venality of the political class and the anarchy marking our legislatures. The rich and the middle class make observations and stop there. The poor are deprived of electricity, road, good drinking water, sanitary conditions, social infrastructure and yet they are the people who keep our democratic system surviving by casting their franchise. The rich get all facilities and abstain from performing their earmarked responsibilities.

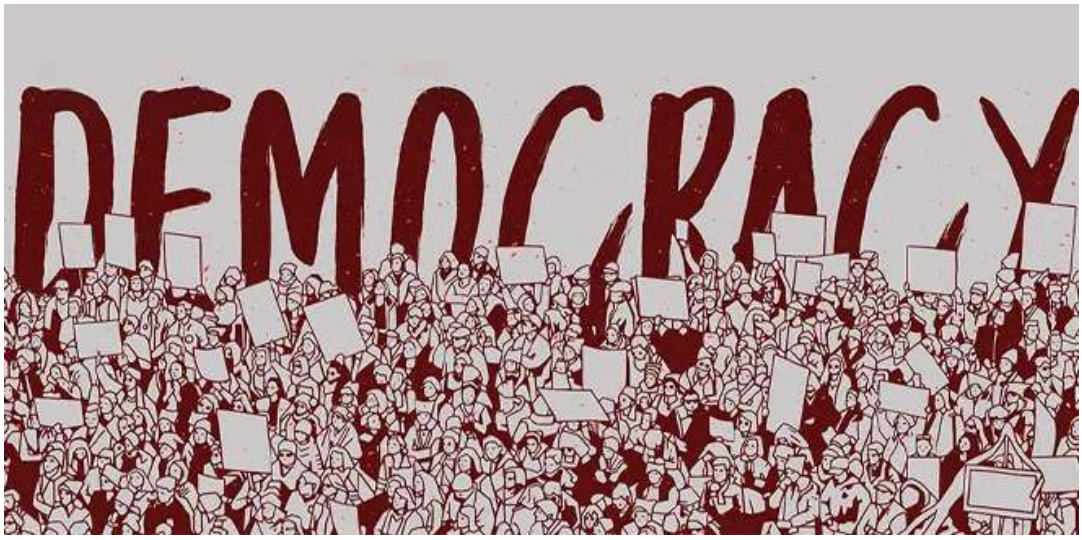
The Indian Constitution, which is the product of the freedom struggle, unequivocally underlines the responsibilities of the State from Article 38 to Article 51 in the following areas: "securing a social order for the promotion of welfare of the people," "ensuring adequate means of livelihood," "ensure the ownership and control of the material resources of the community .are so distributed as best to subserve the common good, and the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the determinant." Governance has to be furbished at the grassroots with "units of self-government" in each village.

In all the above areas how we have performed is the major question. By subverting self-government at the grassroots by centralizing the governance activities, people's voices are mutilated and development activities are made captives of the administrative machinery.

The Commonwealth Foundation, in its study, has brought to light the increasing gap between the people and the government and the ill-treatment meted out to the people at the hands of the government. How to redeem the society from the deep malaise which afflicts it is a big botheration for many [13]. With the introduction of the new economic movement and new formal and legal institutions for governance at the grassroots advantage is a central question to be examined.

5.5 Decentralization and participation

Decentralization is an instrument by which the bases and framework of democracy will be strengthened. Decentralization will be very effective only if people participate in the whole process. So it draws the attention of the whole world. Around eighty countries in the world are moving towards decentralization. Steps are on to strengthen local democracy by increasing the participation of the people in decision making for achieving development. In the present context, the concepts of decentralization, governance, people's participation and globalization have generated a debate on their meaning and their implications.



Source: Image

Before moving into the discussion, the related concepts have to be defined clearly for a clear better understanding of the discourse on decentralization and participation. Decentralization is a process of devolving powers from higher level authoritative bodies to lowest level institutions in the society for governance.

Participation is an act by which the stakeholders involve themselves either on their own or on compulsion in activities right from deciding things to evaluating the same activities which affect their lives directly or indirectly. It is also imperative to understand the backdrop of the decentralization of powers and the participation of people in governance and development.

It is a paradox that for globalization of economy there are protests from all sections of the society and many of such protests are violent also and yet activities are on in a framework developed by the WTO and governments are working vigorously knowing fully the negative implications of globalization.

On the contrary though there is open support from all segments and no protest against decentralization of powers yet governments are not so vigorous in devolving powers to the local institutions to act as autonomous institutions.

Even the people do not realize the full implications of decentralization of powers. In the domain of decentralization of powers participatory governance is the attractive solution for many problems of many groups and for different aspects of development. Participatory governance is about making government more inclusive and more effective in poverty reduction.

Participatory governance will help the poor and marginalized groups to protect their self-respect and self-esteem. It provides scope and space for organized activities of civil society groups. It further provides scope for generating new kinds of leadership at the grassroots committed to development and closer to people. It essentially builds the capacity and capability of the people in managing their affairs with the help of local institutions.

5.6 Resilience of participation

People at the local level organize themselves and protest against the actions of governments. They are being guided by the civil society or the political parties. Affected individuals and groups join together under the guidance of the NGOs or any other civil society organizations. They conduct protest marches and agitate for correcting service delivery systems such as water supply, public distribution. They are micro in nature.

Their activities are short-lived. By making ad hoc arrangements government institutions are tackling these micro movements. There are other groups such as organized women under the banner of SHG (self-help groups). They organize themselves for activities and they are proactive and passive but at the same time they also highlight the issues by which they draw the attention of the government. Massive mobilizations are taking place but they are passive. There is yet another group, independent and active in decision-making. They are the temple committees.

Temples are owned by the communities. They take independent decisions and one could witness active participation of all segments in this committee which is highly democratic in character. One missing element is women. They are autonomous in every aspect. Yet another group is the traditional community committee managing the commons. They perform the job very well in managing the commons with the active participation of all stakeholders excepting women.

Whenever they need any help from the government department, they seek the same also. There is the fishermen's Panchayat. Fishermen have organized themselves for their fishing activities. They collect taxes also. They settle disputes on inter and intra group conflicts. On all occasions they meet and take decisions. Government departments go with the traditional system. But there are no women in the committee.

The above mentioned cases are the best examples to demonstrate the fact that there is resilience of participation among the people. But their participation is narrow and sectoral and not legitimized. After the emergence of the modern state, many of the activities of the communities have been taken away from them and they have been vested with departments of the government.

Government departments have taken over a variety of functions and responsibilities. Many of the services to the community are being delivered by various departments and they are not well regulated and supervised by the participatory management of the people through a system. As a result one can see the poor performance of public institutions.

Source: Image

5.7 New opportunity

The decline of public institutions in terms of their delivery to the poor and the disillusionment of the poor with the public institutions have provided an opportunity to the right wing scholars to raise their voice high on deregulation, reducing public expenditure, reduction of social services and privatization rather than on people's participation in governance, responsiveness of the public institutions to the needs of the poor and more effective forms of democratic state intervention[14].

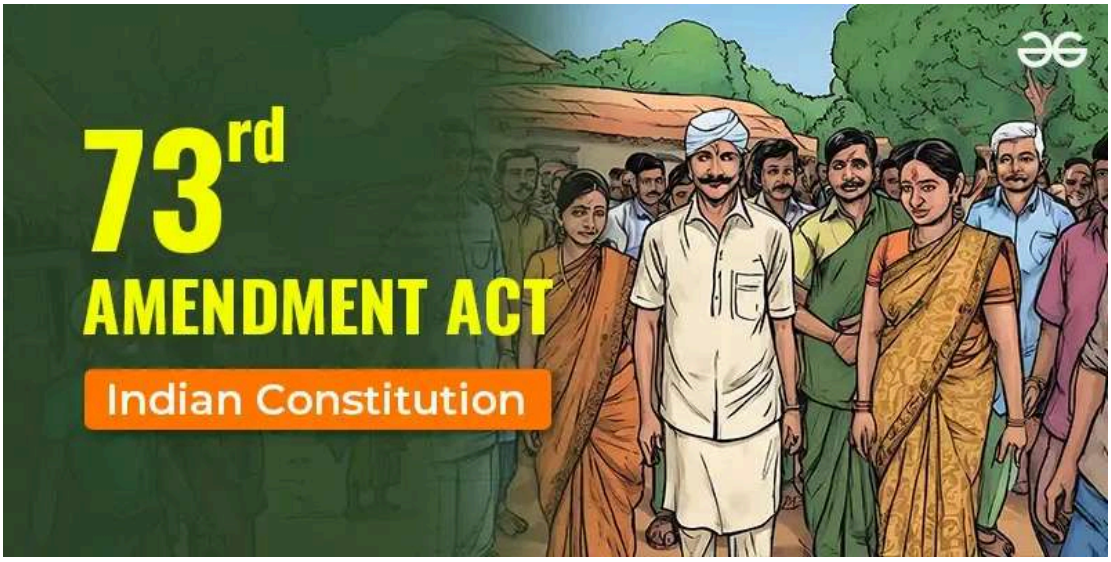
In this context, the new dispensations, namely, decentralization of power and empowering people have come to occupy the centre stage in the discourse on governance. It is not an exclusively Indian phenomenon. It is a global phenomenon. But the global phenomenon takes shape and root in India also through reforming governance and this reforming governance takes shape through a series of Constitutional amendments. Of the amendments, the 73rd and the 74th play a significant role in transforming the character of our democracy from representative to participative democracy.

Of the two historic Constitutional Amendments, the 73rd created an opportunity for the people to participate in the process of governance and development. Making the people participate in the process of governance and development is not easy as they have been driven away successfully in the past five decades from the governance and development domain.

The bureaucracy has occupied the space vacated by the people but it does not perform the role assigned to it as it has been oriented to act in accordance with the directions of the higher ups. Roughly 40% of the people are always on the periphery and not in the system as participants. They have been branded either as beneficiaries or as petitioners. They are also complacent with the designation as they want to remain in the same space without any responsibility.

In a democracy, they are the vibrant voters and their demands cannot be ignored. Their demands are not complicated. Their main demand is to keep their names in the BPL list and be provided with doles.

The political climate is such that populism becomes the mainstay in politics for securing votes. Now it is competitive populism. As a result development takes the back seat. But the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India brings a totally new paradigm which emphasizes the fact that the beneficiaries have to be transformed into development participants. Economic development is the task of the community for which they have to plan. The government will facilitate the endeavour and the initiative of the community. To make it happen, it is necessary to create a new mindset.



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To perform the above task the participation of the people is an imperative. Before moving into the domain, the meaning of the concept has to be cleared. The concept of participation is perceived differently by different stakeholders and individuals. Participation means a kind of local autonomy in which people discover the possibilities of exercising choice and thereby becoming capable of managing their own development[15]. The UNESCO document defines participation as "collective sustained activity for the purpose of achieving some common objectives, especially a more equitable distribution of the benefits of development".[16]

It happens in the temple festival committee, the committee managing the commons in the villages, self-help groups and other rural traders' guild but not in the Panchayat. Participation takes place in Panchayat at a limited level. The real purpose of participation is to develop human capabilities for development, decision-making and action.

Participation should have some key components: a. it must start from the lowest; b. participation must take place at all stages; c. participation must focus on the issues of the poor; d. participation must be on substance and issues; e. it alters existing leadership arrangements; f. it alters the style of leadership; g. it brings about conflict also in allocating resources.

To operationalize the above points, steps have been taken and ten key ideas have been generated for putting the theory into practice. They are: level of participation, initiation and process, control, power and purpose, role of the practitioner, stakeholders and community, partnership, commitment, ownership of ideas and confidence and capacity. At present, generally, participation is conceived as a phenomenon related to rural development.

Organizations are plenty and they do their functions as they assume. But the predominance of government institutions has prevented the participation of the people in governance to decide their economic activities. Participation now anchors on the process of decision making.

After a long gap participation has been made a reality through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India by creating a Gram Sabha in every Gram Panchayat. The Gram Sabha is an assembly of the people who have registered as voters in the Panchayat area. This provision of creating the Gram Sabha has transformed the very character of democracy from representative to direct and participatory democracy.

The 73rd Amendment has created the Gram Sabha but activating the Gram Sabha depends on the State Government and the Panchayat leaders. The whole process of development is changed topsy-turvy by which the supply driven development activities have changed into demand driven activities and that too through a planning process with the active involvement and participation of the people.

When we talk about the participation of the people in the process of development, it should mean participation of the marginalized, socially excluded categories like Dalits and women. Their participation is more important as socially and politically empowered groups are always participating in governance and share the spoils. The new dispensation provides this new opportunity to these groups hitherto neglected, oppressed and unattended to.

Here one has to clearly understand the new meaning of the term and the process. Participation means, it includes the women and Dalits in decision making and hearing the voices of the above groups for decision making.

But there is always a potential danger in this new opportunity as social groups will organize and reorganize themselves to suit the new requirements as women and Dalits are fielded as candidates on behalf of the husband or family and the higher caste groups. [17] The marginalized groups are present in the power structure but they are not independent as they are under the influence of the backseat drivers.

So participation has to start from the Dalits and women that too poor ones. The participation has to be in all stages from the consultative process with the aim of making the poor Dalits and women the owners of development. This has to continue from decision making to, monitoring, evaluation and implementation of all development activities.

Participation should be focused more on the issues of the poor. Normally in the whole process one will witness conflict as new groups come to assert themselves and thereby it will alter the leadership--either the leadership style of the present leader would be changed or the leader himself will be changed. Thus participation will bring the government closer to the people or the people will move closer to the government.

People will raise their voices collectively through legitimate institutions for substantial issues of the poor people. Such a wonderful opportunity comes through this new dispensation. But it needs concerted effort on two fronts.

The Government at the higher level has to create such an ambience and civil society have to mobilize the people for a new dialogue, discourse and discussion on development issues.

But the moot question is to what extent the provisions of the Constitution are translated into action. It is obvious from our experience that many of the vital provisions of the Constitution have not been translated into action [18]. In this context, a new provision in the Constitution creates a new opportunity.

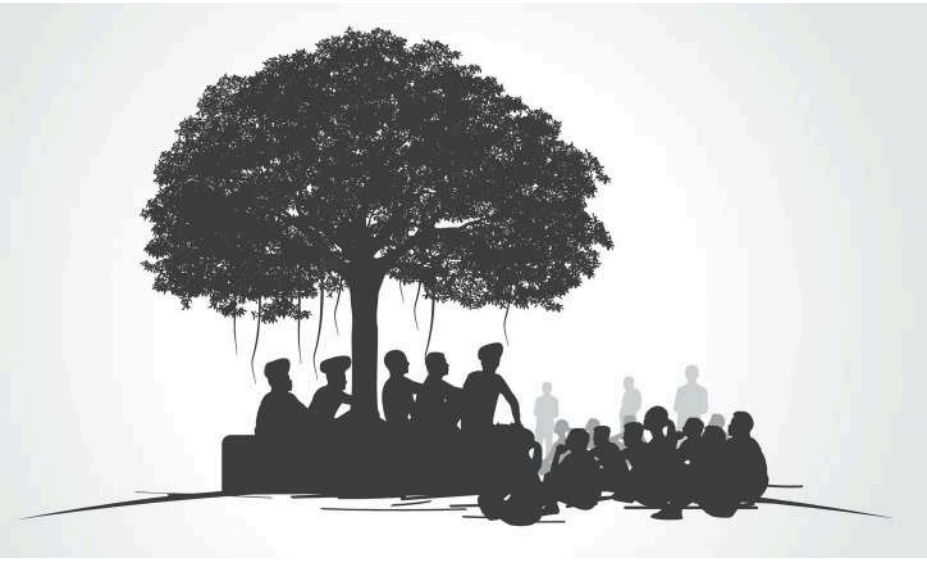
5.8 The question

The question is whether the new opportunity can be utilized by the people. There is an axiom that when power is devolved to a low level institution from a higher level institution with much responsibility and power, social collectivities will organize themselves with different identities to capture the power and so the provision granted by the Constitution will be denied by the community.

This new opportunity is to be seen in this light. While reviewing the literature, one finds that interesting trends are emerging from the field. There are forces working silently and subtly against this process of deepening of democracy as a large number of beneficiaries in the present system are going to be affected in this process; wherever the social collectives are already empowered through different identities, they have started asserting themselves in the public space but their assertions are not positively responded to [19].

This creates tension among the collectivities. It gives a sense that this provision creates conflict among the collectivities. It is to be done peacefully. Whenever Panchayat leaders are from the dominant community, they draw the people for participation but it is not participation but congregation. But whenever the leaders are able to understand the system perfectly, they deliver the services to the level of expectation and hence they draw people to the public space for participation at the grassroots. It has to go beyond this stage.

Wherever the social collectivities, especially those from the marginalized, are empowered and assertive, they have started asserting themselves and posited a volley of questions in the Gram Sabha to safeguard their interests. Their demands such as continuous drinking water supply to their hamlets to the level of need, effective service delivery from primary health centres, proper distribution of essential commodities from the public distribution systems shops, proper distribution of government benefits to the eligible beneficiaries, making educational institutions of the government function effectively and efficiently as they only cater to the needs of the poor and marginalized.



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When voices are raised by the marginalized groups, those who hitherto enjoyed power and position felt uncomfortable whether they were people from dominant castes or the bureaucracy. It became evident from the field work that the marginalized groups were not allowed to participate in full as it would destabilize the position of dominant groups which hitherto enjoyed power, status and position.

Wherever the marginalized groups have determined to participate there one finds conflict[20]. Because of their numerical strength, they have got the power to alter the leadership. Many have fostered new alliances with Dalits and SHG women to capture power and accordingly the leadership style has been changed[21].

When a new opportunity is being given to the poor and the marginalized, they have started raising their issues pertinent to the issue of piece of land for their shelter, continuous employment opportunity, effective delivery of service to them by the government departments free of cost. Effective and capable leaders will manage the institutions in a transparent way of administration and accommodate the marginalized groups under this fold.

Source: Image

Thus a new leadership is emerging because of the participation of the poor and marginalized. There are Panchayat leaders who have converted the Panchayat and Gram Sabha into information centres, discussion centres, guidance centres, and councelling centres by which the poor and marginalized are being helped.

But in many places it is seen that efforts are taken to keep the poor and the marginalized away from the corridors of power and the new spaces created for the participation of the poor and marginalized. There are places where intensive conflicts are goings on among the different segments of the committees.

One thing is clear that the Constitutional Amendment has created a new avenue and opportunity to the marginalized to go nearer to power and to get things done for them. It is to be noted that what Mahatma Gandhi wanted to achieve through Panchayats by the participation of the people can be achieved by utilizing the new opportunity created through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India, provided the Gandhian scholars and activists contextually conceptualize the Gandhian framework of governance[22].

5.9 Conclusion

What is to be done is more important than what has been done as changes are fast in the society. First, to make the people participate, in governance steps have to be taken fast. It is obvious that in a society where people are deeply divided on caste and are under a strong patriarchy one cannot expect that things will be changed fast.

It is difficult to remove all the barriers and obstacles at the grassroots for the marginalized to participate in the decision making process. Mobilizing the poor and marginalized for public action in the context of resistance from above is a stupendous task for which the leaders at the grassroots should have needed skill and capacity. The leaders who are in the process of mobilizing the poor, marginalized and displaced need a strong support base from the civil society to sustain their activities.

Source: Image

Likewise the poor and the marginalized need capacity and support for their participation in public discourse as it alters the existing paradigm of governance and development.

The present scenario of participation indicates only violence and conflict as the participation of the poor and marginalized has made the people who are at the helm of affairs uncomfortable.

Thus powers have to be given to the lowest unit of governance to take vital decisions on issues which affect the people. This will draw more number of people to participate. Normally people are excluded from participation because they are kept away from knowledge consumption, resources and technology.

To empower the people, the capability of the people has to be enhanced. But the existing conditions create a gap among the collectivities in terms of knowledge endowment, resource endowment and technology endowment.

So the existing gap has to be bridged among the collectivities. For this, policy options have to be sought. Further an innovative and active democratic culture can be created at different levels to allow the excluded to participate in the process of governance and development.

5.10 Notes and references

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