partly explain why their investigators were given answers which are encouraging to the research workers. "Yes, we only want 2 children", "Yes, we think your education programme was fine". How much were these verbal answers checked by hard facts? Not enough. Probably also too much reliance was placed on answers given at one or very few interviews. People do not usually reveal their true selves immediately, and Puerto Ricans do not doubt share with most ordinary rural people an understanding of the truth of the saying that "a soft answer turneth away wrath".

The authors seem to be convinced that the medically preferred methods of contraception offered by the clinics are essential for bringing down the birth rate. If this is their conviction they have overlooked the fact that the birth rate in their own and other Western countries has been brought down mostly by the use of two such "inferior" methods as douching and withdrawal, with condom. The difference is that people in the West not only said they wanted small families when asked by investigators but they were also determined to have small families.

All who are concerned with the population problem are much in debt to Hill, Syencs, Back and their many helpers. They have pioneered a way into very difficult territory, and they have been good enough to share their thinking processes as well as their data with all who take the trouble to read their book. Anyone who has had experience of this type of field work will appreciate; how much labour has gone into this study. If they have not got all the answers, neither has anyone else. They have shown the value of their approach and their method of work: that it also has weaknesses is understandable. It is no easy task to investigate the social and psychological aspects of human reproduction.

Jayapprakash Narayan's Thesis
Report of a Discussion

Rajni Kothari

IN discussion-groups and seminars in India, by and large, speech-making tends to overshadow genuine 'discussion' and enthusiasm to present one's own ideas is rarely matched by receptivity to other people's ideas. Secondly, the viewpoints presented are more or less standardised viewpoints. Even where there is controversy—very often there isn't any—the purpose of the discussion seems less to resolve the controversy than to disolve it in high-sounding rhetoric. Thirdly, the value of a discussion-group or a seminar is judged more from the brilliance displayed by individual speakers than by the quality or level of discussion. Positions remain unaltered and every one goes home none the wiser.

Such a discussion-group met in Bombay to discuss Shri Jayapprakash Narayan's thesis: "A Plea for Reconstruction of Indian Polity" which has been in private circulation and has attracted considerable attention of late, both in India and abroad. The group was organised by the Indian Committee of Cultural Freedom and met on the 16th and 17th of March at the Indian Merchants' Chamber Hall.

THE THESIS

Discussion on the working of democracy in India seems to be assuming of late a new dimension with the revival of the theme of "indigenous democracy", of a polity that would suit the needs of the Indian genius rather than a mutilated version of an imported political structure. The most important exponent of this theme, no doubt, is Shri Jayapprakash Narayan who has performed the valuable service of making articulate the hidden premises of the Sarvodaya ideal. Before reporting on the discussion on the Thesis, therefore, it is necessary to give here a brief summary of the Thesis proper.

The thesis consists of (1) an analysis of the prevailing political system in India and (2) the way out. The author is entirely dissatisfied with the parliamentary system in general, wherever it exists, more particularly in India. A parliamentary government is at best an "electoral oligarchy". It rules by passive consent rather than by active participation. Its evils are centralisation of power, bureaucratisation of all initiative, party politics, demagoguery, manipulation of mass media of communication, etc. These inherent defects of the system are all the more accentuated in India because of lack of proper traditions and a conventional code of political behaviour, lack of self-governing regional and professional bodies, an irresponsible and irremovable majority faced by an irresponsible and resourceless Opposition, and economic backwardness, giving rise to centralised planning and widening tentacles of bureaucracy. The root of the evil lies in the "baffling vastness" and complexity of modern industrial society which, of necessity, gives rise to excessive concentration of power.

In place of such a system, J P would like India to be organised on the model of a "communitarian society", a society made of small, compact, "optimum" communities where the individual, possessed by a "sense of community", is also enabled to participate directly in the process of decision-making and where the prevailing pyramidal structure is replaced by a system of "ever-widening, never-ascending circles" with the individual at the centre and the country and finally the whole world at the circumference. The important task is to create this "sense of community", to inculcate a philosophy in which the essentially social nature of man is brought into an organic relation with the "totality", to base human organisation on the principles of trusteeship, "dharma" and a voluntary limitation of wants and to evolve institutions to suit the "social genius of India" so that they may "sustain, revive and strengthen the whole fabric of Indian society".

More concretely, J P envisages a system in which at the base—or rather at the centre (the symmetry he has in mind is oceanic, not architectural)—there are the "primary communities" more or less of the size of the existing revenue uillages. These are the "self-governing, self-sufficient, agro-industrial, urbo-rural, local communities". Beyond them are the "regional communities" in which a number of primary commu-
GETTING READY FOR STEELMAKING

A skilled Indian technician makes adjustments to the Temperature Recorder for an Open Hearth Furnace in the Steel Melting Shop at Durgapur Steelworks.

The commissioning of the first Open Hearth Furnaces and the start of steel production at Durgapur will be another step forward in this great Indo-British enterprise.
nities come together. Similarly, a number of regional communities form into the "district communities", which in turn form the "provincial communities" and finally there is the "National Community". A hope is also expressed that "a day might come when the national communities might federate together to form the World Community". This is the structure.

The manner of conducting business is also simple. At the local level, there is the "Gram Sabha" of which the membership extends to all adults in the village. The Executive of the village is to be vested in the "Gram Panchayat" formed not by elections but by "general consensus of opinion in the Sabha". Failing agreement, the selection is to be by "drawing lots". At the regional level, the Gram Panchayats will be integrated into a "Panchayat Samiti" on the basis of indirect elections from the Gram Panchayats. Following this pattern—and always on the basis of indirect elections—there will be the "District Council", the "State Assembly" and the "Lok Sabha". At each level, the administration is to be carried on by "committees of representative bodies" which are to be assisted by civil servants and which would be coordinated in a "Coordinating Committee". Legislative powers will be exercised at these various levels on the basis of division of functions and delegation of powers from the centre to the periphery. But in general more power will reside in the village communities. This is the scheme of J P's communitarian democracy.

II

THE DISCUSSION

So much for the thesis. Turning to the discussion on the thesis, three main groups of participants could be distinguished:

1. The supporters of J P whose principal contribution was to point out that the Thesis was a 'cry from the soul' of a person greatly distressed at the current drift of politics in this country;

2. The apologists of the parliamentary system of democracy who considered J P's approach as negative and Utopian; and

3. Critics who, while they agreed with a part of J P's analysis of the existing system, vehemently rejected his remedy of a "Communitarian Society".

The criticisms voiced in the discussion could be conveniently grouped into six.

1. In defence of parliamentary institutions:

The experience of this form of government in India was too limited to justify the conclusions drawn by J P. Professor Ham Joshi strongly pressed the viewpoint that the defects in the present system were more incidental than inherent and the real problem in India was to build up the existing institutions and lay down proper conventions for the same. Experience of England has shown that sound local self-governing institutions provided ample opportunities for citizen participation and given a strong tradition of democracy, parties could also be a great educative influence. Professor Dantwala made the point that "if the simultaneous existence of the present evils on the one hand and parliamentary institutions on the other at best established a correlation, not a causal scheme. The evils, he suggested, are not because of but in spite of parliamentary government. They were more of an economic and social nature, it stems that he hoped that good planning and efficient administration could solve these evils. Also among this group was Mrs. Taya Zinkin who observed, in a truly journalistic fashion, that the public reaction to the Nanavati case was proof that democracy was alive in India and people were participating in it.

2. Need for action, not academicians:

The arch-propagator of a thoroughgoing if naive pragmatism was Shri A D Gorwalla who repeatedly stressed the point that the need in India was for good men to enter politics and drive the bad men out, to "purify" the polity by permeating existing institutions and to end corruption and nepotism by bringing to an end the prevailing power monopoly. Human nature being what it is, party politics cannot be eschewed. Instead of building up a sound democratic Opposition to the ruling party, men like J P were diverting national attention to Utopian schemes and revivalist ideas. J P's thesis was little more than an exercise in academic analysis while the need of the moment was not system-building but action.

3. Consent versus participation:

J P's advocacy of a 'participating democracy' attracted a great deal of comment, much of which was confused. A large number of participants took the position that it was both impossible and undesirable for all citizens to participate in government. Professor Dantwala, Shri Kunte and others pointed out that government was too technical a matter to be handled by untutored masses. What was needed was an efficient expertise. The function of the people was to throw out a government that they did not like. For this, they were provided with the instrument of elections. Parliamentary government was a government by consent. History is full of instances where more participating systems with their referendums and plebiscites had played into the hands of demagogues and dictators. A government that ruled by consent must always keep its ears close to the ground. Participation must be limited to a few: consent, however, must come from a majority.

4. Examination of the Communitarian Society:

Alongside these criticisms on the traditional lines, there were a few others who took a different position on J P's Thesis. They directed their criticism on the 'constructive' part of the thesis. While they did not agree with other speakers in their defense of the 'status quo' and went some way with J P in his analysis of the existing political set-up in India, they had no sympathy for his remedy. The remedy, they felt, was in a sense more dangerous than the disease. A Communitarian society would accentuate rather than alleviate the existing social and economic disparities. A Panchayat Haj may well turn out to be a Status Society. The doctrine of trusteeship and the cull for a voluntary limitation of wants are bound to strengthen enormously the hands of the haves who would have more while the have-nots would continue to be have-nots. Again, J P has confused centralisation of power with largeness of the existing social unit. The former is not necessarily a function of the latter. You could have centralisation of power in Gram Panchayats—in the hands of the dominant caste—as much as in the State or the Centre. In fact, such concentrated pockets of power all over the country would introduce another form of feudalism. The question of centralisation was therefore, more qualitative than quantitative.
It was also pointed out that it was wrong to imagine that party politics would disappear as soon as the size of the polity was reduced. The history of Greek city-states—and of the Indian Republics of the past which J P takes as his model—brings enough testimony to the view that local factionalism can sometimes render the polity more important than national divisions. Indeed, it was possible to advance a tentative hypothesis that in villages in India where factionalism was rampant, political divisions might perform the important task of diverting parochial loyalties based on hereditary compulsions toward party loyalties based on voluntary association and some identification of principles and policies. The hypothesis, of course, needs to be tested.

On the question of atomisation of the individual, it was pertinently pointed out that the problem in India was not to return to a new organism—as envisaged in J P's Communitarian society—but to liberate the individual from the existing organism. The process of individualisation had not gone far in our villages and it was on the realisation of a sense of individuality rather than in searching for a sense of community that the advance of democracy in this country depended. A true sense of community could only be based on the freedom of individuals. The line of progress, from the viewpoint of individual development, was from primitive organism to individuation and then to a reintegration on the basis of freedom and association. Likewise, the line of progress for a free society was from organism to association. A Communitarian society as envisaged by J P failed to fulfil either of these criteria.

5. Institutions are not enough:

These critics also challenged the very conception of social change and political reconstruction found in the thesis. Change was thought of in it in terms of an elaborate institutional structure that would replace the existing one, the assumption being that an ideal institutional set-up would solve the crisis in which democracy found itself today. Here J P was making precisely the same error as made by those constitutional pundits who had hoped that by instituting a parliamentary form of government they would make India democratic. Our experience shows that institutions, in the absence of a proper spirit, served interests quite different from the ones they were supposed to serve. The creation of the pre-conditions of democracy was a function, not of institutional change, but of political education and of changes in cultural values and attitudes.

It was pointed out, however, that underlying J P's faith in village institutions lay something else. He had a mystic notion of what he called the 'Indian genius'. All that was necessary, therefore, was to evolve institutions to suit this 'genius'. The important thing was to educate this so-called 'genius' itself. The values we have cherished for centuries are essentially authoritarian values and we have first to change them before embarking upon any large-scale institutional reforms. It is significant that even while J P speaks on the role of education, his emphasis is in terms of education to create 'a spirit of community' with which 'the whole body politic would be without life and soul' rather than in terms of spreading essential democratic values from the elite to the masses. Thus, said these critics, J P tended to equate democracy with local community living, with formal decentralisation, with elimination of bigness and so on. The whole approach was excessively formalistic. It was also obscurantist and mystical.

On this point, the very concept of 'rural democracy' was challenged. The pre-conditions of democracy just did not exist in our villages. Liberty, equality and all the rest of them were essentially urban ideas, generated from urban conditions of living. From there they would penetrate into the villages. If we recognise the role of intellectuals in our society as one of spreading these values, we must also recognise the positive role that urbanisation could play in the formation of democratic traditions.

6. Need for a new leadership:

Finally, the all-important point was made that the political problem in India was that of control, not community. Power must be controlled wherever it resides, in Parliament or Panchayat. And this is the task of political leadership. What is urgently needed is the rise of a new leadership. This was the function, above all, of political enlightenment and constant vigilance. Men must be lead to feel and fight for their rights. Democracy is not something that could be taken for granted. It had to be nurtured and preserved from the onslaughts of authoritarianism. A Communitarian society was no answer to such a challenge.

11 THE REPLY

The discussion ended with J P's 'sinking-up'. He did not put up a fight to his thesis. But what he said outside the pale of his thesis was remarkable. He was pained to see that few had read and none had understood his message. He felt very unhappy, even "felt like crying" at the way the whole thing was discussed. (Many of us could not understand this either!) He was shocked to find how anyone could believe that he would propose anything undemocratic. His whole life had been dedicated to the cause of freedom. His references to Pakistan's or Egypt's experiments with new types of polity were so grossly misinterpreted. But he did not wish to go into that. Nor did he intend to reply to the various criticisms raised during the discussion. He would rather explain his position once again. And that he did.

J P repeated the general argument of his thesis, adding, however, that "deeds, not words" would prove it. He would have liked to invite the participants to the two villages of Berani and Belsara in Bihar where true democracy functioned, where a Communitarian society prevailed and where everyone got his needs fulfilled from a common pool to which he contributed all his earnings. He was also contemplating, along with some others, to start a large experiment in Bihar on the lines laid down in his thesis. (Here was another plan for a model community. But as some admirer of J P remarked in the lobby, "Even if he succeeds in his experiment, how many J Ps do we have in India? After all, even Englab had one Robert Owen!")

Jayaprakash left the impression of being distressed and misunderstood. There was a note of urgency in his prefatory remarks to the discussion on the first day when he had said that if only leaders of opinion in the country agreed on his scheme, the change could be a "comparatively simple affair". Towards the end of the discussion, he appeared to have withdrawn in a mood of resignation from any idea of such an agreement. He would rather rely on "deeds, not words".