Political Socialization of Secondary School Children in North India

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During the last decade and a half, there has been an impressive growth in the literature on political socialization of children. Most of the pioneering studies on this subject dealt with children in the United States, but in recent years a large number of well documented works have also appeared that examine the socialization process in some of the countries of Western Europe. However, only a few scholars have shown interest in the political learning process in non-Western systems. This subject has not been especially popular with political scientists who are concerned with political development and political culture in India.

In the context of Indian politics, it has usually been assumed that whereas the family plays a prominent role in the early political socialization of children, members of the older generations in India were more influenced by the nationalist movement and by such political stalwarts as M. K. Gandhi, J. L. Nehru, and S. C. Bose (Goel 1970: 237).

It could also be true, however, that because Indian society is highly segmented, and loyalties towards the caste, religious, and linguistic groups are strong, the political sub-cultures of these communal groups may play a significant role in the political socialization of Indian children. They may develop strong communal loyalties which override the commitment to a national orientation. Many of the recent studies of Indian political culture point to the existence of a significant relationship between communal groups, voting behavior, and the party affiliations of the Indian populace. These studies, seem to confirm the particularistic direction of the political socialization process in India.

It could also be argued that with the spread of the mass media, the exposure of the majority of the citizenry to radios and movies and the general emphasis of the government on national integration through education, the traditional role of family, kinship group, caste, and religion might have de-
clined in the political learning process of Indian children. The general process of socialization might have become more universalistic than it appears.

In this paper, I intend to test some of these assumptions and draw some tentative conclusions regarding the political socialization process in India. Given the nature of the data, my goals are modest. I want to investigate children's perceptions of the role of socialization agencies in the development of their political orientations, their level of trust in public officials, their perception of the qualities of "good citizenship," and their identification with different types of political or social leaders. Because I used some of the questions developed by David Koff et al. (1973: 231) in their study of political socialization in three developing countries of East Africa, the data should enable me to make cross-national comparisons.

Settings and Research Procedure

The data for this study was collected in the fall of 1974, through the administration of a four-page questionnaire which had 51 fixed items and a few open-ended questions. All of the questions were in Hindi, and they were administered to ninth grade students in twelve secondary schools of Punjab and Delhi.

In both Punjab and Delhi states, as in most of North India, the secondary schools are mainly of three types. The largest secondary school system is run by the state. The state governments may run these institutions directly through their own departments of education, or they may indirectly manage them through city corporations. These schools provide free education or charge only nominal fees. The teachers are recruited primarily on the basis of merit and scholarship, not on the basis of caste or communal ties. These schools use Hindi or local languages for instructional purposes.

The second type of secondary school is the private institution. Here the schools are run mainly by religious organizations, such as the Christian missions, Arya Samaj, and Sanatan Dharm Sabha, the two Hindu religious organizations, or the Sikh religious groups. Some community or caste groups may also have their own schools. These schools, like the government system, employ Hindi or local languages for teaching purposes. The convent schools, run by various Christian missions are, however, exceptions. In the convent schools, the medium of instruction is English, though Hindi is taught as a second language. In these schools, the teachers are recruited mostly on a communal or sectarian basis, and efforts are made to expose the students to the religious values of the denomination that manages the school.

The third type of school system consists of public schools, based upon the British model of boarding schools and a new category of institutions called model schools. Both types of schools provide instruction in English, with special emphasis on the learning of the English languages and the norms and values of the upper middle class. Hindi is taught as a second language in these schools. The public schools (the boarding schools) are expensive and exclusive; there