Sub-cultural Variations and Political Socialization: The Case of North Indian Youth

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NEW NATIONS of the Third World face the enormous task of creating internal cohesion by way of achieving what Clifford Geertz has called an "integrative revolution."1 The highly fragmented nature of the social organization of former colonies of the Western powers in Asia and Africa has caused them to be termed as artificial states or "non-national states." According to Manning Nash, "As a political type, the non-national state is marked by the presence of two societies within one political network."2 One society consists of those people who identify with the totality of the nation, and the second group consists of those persons who have no national awareness and who work through a network of local societies. Thus, "the political life of a non-national state is conducted in a social system with two levels of social and cultural integration, resulting in different organizations and tasks at each level."3 Lacking an integrated framework of universally acceptable norms and structure, such nations have also been referred to as "socially and culturally plural societies." According to M. G. Smith, "Pluralism is a condition in which members of a common society are internally distinguished by fundamental differences in their institutional practices."4 He further adds that "social and cultural pluralism simultaneously connotes a social structure characterized by fundamental discontinuities and cleavages and cultural complex based on a systematic institutional diversity."5 In such societies the primordial ties based upon language, religion, ethnicity, caste and tribe keep reinforcing the traditional divisions within the society and prevent the rise of what Edward Shils has termed "a single civil society."6 In these fragmented societies, furthermore, it is stressed that the socialization process tends to create particularistic in place of universalistic loyalties7 and precludes the development of an attachment to the civic state itself and thus will lead to continuous political instability.8

Not only that, since there exist diverse and often conflicting norms and institutions in such settings, the socialization process may lead to the inoculation of antagonistic value systems among different segments of the population.9
Such a development could ultimately lead to the breakdown of the nation state itself.

India has often been cited as an example of a plural or segmented society. Indian polity consists of numerous ethnic, linguistic and regional groups, whereas the Indian social system is fragmented both vertically and horizontally. The Indian social system, however, has not stayed static during the last thirty years. India has been undergoing a rapid process of political and social mobilization. This ongoing political mobilization has brought about fundamental alterations in the organizational structure of a traditional society, because political mobilization is a process "by which a significant number of previously quiescent persons are brought to perform relatively deliberate and concerted political acts. The acts may include voting, joining a political organization, engaging in a political strike or demonstration, armed rebellion, and a host of other acts with immediate and intended political consequences." On the other hand, social mobilization, which is interlinked with political mobilization, refers to a process "by which old relationships, customary patterns of social and economic activity, and former attitudes are eroded and displaced and joined by new and different social psychological patterns." Referring to the changes taking place in the political and social system of India, Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph have distinguished three different patterns of mobilization occurring in that society. The first level is termed as vertical mobilization which involves patron-client or superordinate-subordinate (raja praja) relationships based upon traditional deference. The second level is described as horizontal mobilization which will lead to the development of increased group solidarity based upon both traditional and non-traditional bases of social stratification such as caste, class and religion. The third and final level is called differential mobilization involving political parties or other associational groups which build mass support by integrating the demands of different social and cultural groups existing within Indian society.

Evidently, the conclusions drawn by the Rudolphs suggest the existence of a high degree of fluidity in the social structure developing in India. It is possible to argue, therefore, that sub-cultural variations which exist in India are based upon a mixture of traditions and modernity. Along with caste and linguistic groups, the sub-cultural lines are also likely to be drawn on new bases of social stratification such as class, education and occupation. Under these conditions political socialization may follow differential patterns among different sub-cultural groups. To put it in other words, since exposure to modern values is not uniform among different segments of Indian society, various agents of political socialization should be playing diverse roles among the citizens of India with different sub-cultural backgrounds. In this kind of situation, traditional and modern agents of socialization may be working simultaneously in different sub-cultural groups. This should not necessarily imply that the socialization process is working at cross purposes and is reinforcing traditional cleavages and particularistic loyalties. In fact, it appears