

LETTER TO THE READERS

As India completes sixty years as an independent and democratic country, it is time to look back and reflect on this period. So much of the trends and patterns of our politics as well as the strengths and weaknesses of our democracy have been shaped during these six decades. Yet it is surprising how little the younger citizens of our country know about this history. You would have a good idea of the freedom struggle because you study that in the History textbooks. You would also know something about our contemporary politics from the media. But very few young citizens know much about the period that connects the freedom movement to contemporary politics. This is the gap the present book seeks to fill. It tells you the story of the journey of our democracy during the last sixty years so that you can make sense of the political reality that surrounds all of us.

This book is not a chronicle of all or even main events during the past six decades. We have tried to weave the history of the last sixty years around some major issues and themes. The first eight chapters of the book cover a certain period of this history, but in a selective manner by focussing on one issue or theme that dominated those years. The final chapter offers an overview of various issues that have emerged in the most recent period.

Politics is often understood as a power game played by some big leaders. Politics is, of course, about power. But politics is also about taking collective decisions, about sorting out differences, about reaching consensus. That is why we simply cannot run our collective affairs without politics. Similarly, big leaders no doubt influence the course of politics. But politics is much more than a story of individual ambitions and frustrations. That is why you will not find much emphasis on personalities in this book. You will find some biographical sketches so as to give you a rich sense of those times. But we do not expect you to memorise these biographical details.

In order to give you a feel of the times, we have included many photographs, cartoons, maps and other images. As in other books, Unni and Munni are there to share their innocent yet irreverent questions and comments with you. By now you know that what Unni and Munni say is not the opinion of the textbook. You, and even the authors, may or may not agree with Unni and Munni. But you should, like them, begin to question everything.

This book refrains from passing judgement on events and personalities of this period. The objective of this book is to equip you with information and perspectives so that you can take more informed and well thought out positions on politics, either as students of Political Science or as citizens of the country. That is why we tell the story in an open-ended and non-partisan manner. This has not been easy, for there is no way



a book like this can side-step all the 'controversial' issues. Many of the significant issues of this period were and continue to be subjects of deep political differences.

The Team that prepared this book decided to follow certain norms to ensure non-partisan treatment of the subject. Firstly, it presents more than one viewpoint when dealing with controversial subjects. Secondly, wherever available, it uses authentic sources like the reports of various Commissions or court judgements, to reconstruct crucial details. Thirdly, it uses a variety of sources from scholarly writings to different newspapers and magazines, etc. to tell the story. Fourthly, the book avoids detailed discussion of the role of political leaders who are still active in politics.

Writing this textbook turned out to be particularly challenging for we do not have sufficient information on this period. Most of the archival material is still closed to the researchers. There are not many standard histories of this period that a textbook like this can draw upon. The Textbook Development Committee turned this challenge into an opportunity. We are grateful to the Team members who spared their valuable time for preparing the drafts of the various chapters. We would like to place on record our gratitude to Professors Rekha Chowdhary and Surinder Jodhka for contributing drafts for the sections on Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab respectively.

Given the significance and the sensitive nature of the book, it was decided to put the drafts through many rounds of scrutiny by a group of Political Scientists and historians. We decided to request three 'readers' – Dr. Ramchandra Guha, Professor Sunil Khilnani and Dr. Mahesh Rangarajan – to read an early draft of this text for accuracy and non-partisan treatment of the subject. We are very grateful that all of them accepted our request and took out time to read and comment on the drafts. Their remarks encouraged us; their suggestions saved us from many errors. We owe a special debt to Ramchandra Guha, since we have liberally drawn upon his book, *India after Gandhi*. Dr. Philip Oldenberg also read parts of the book and made valuable comments. We were fortunate in having a group of eminent scholars, Professors Mrinal Miri, G.P. Deshpande and Gopal Guru, who constituted a special sub-committee of the National Monitoring Committee and read the book at least thrice. We wish to thank Professor Krishna Kumar, Director NCERT and Professor Hari Vasudevan, Chairperson, Advisory Committee for Textbooks, for their support, advice and guidance at different stages of this delicate project. We are also thankful to Professor Yash Pal for his interest in and support to this book.

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This book is a tribute to the maturity of Indian democracy and is intended as a small contribution to enriching the democratic deliberations in our country. We sincerely hope that this book will be received in this spirit and will be useful not only for students of Political Science but also to a wider group of young citizens of our country.

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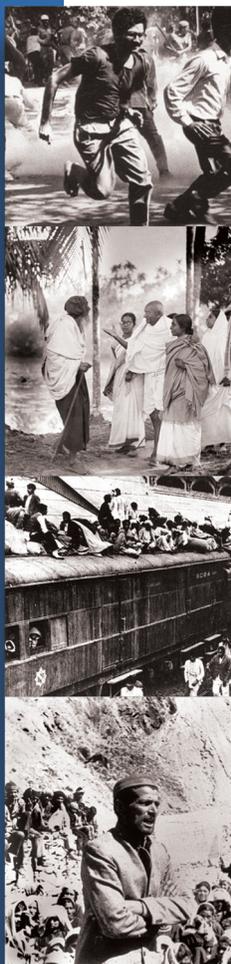
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