

Nikhil Menon
Princeton University
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**Democratic Planning: University Planning Forums and India's Second Five-Year
Plan, 1956-1961**

The generous funding provided by the History Project and the Institute for New Economic Thinking (INET) allowed me to conduct more than two months of archival research in New Delhi over the summer of 2013 (July-August). During this period my research was directed towards looking at the ways in which the Government of India during the 1950s and early 1960s delivered on, or fell short of, its promise of 'democratic planning'. Histories of planning in India have largely overlooked the efforts made by the Indian state to convince its citizenry of the need for planning, to make the country "plan conscious", and to gain their participation in the planning project. In my research in Delhi, I focused in particular on the experiment with university planning forums. This is part of a broader dissertation project on economic planning in the first two decades of postcolonial India (1947-1966). My dissertation studies India's planning experience by shining a spotlight on certain key themes – (i) the significance of national statistics and the Indian Statistical Institute's role in planning, (ii) the import and manufacture of India's first computers and their use in planning, (iii) efforts made by the Planning Commission, in collaboration with the Ford Foundation and American universities, to develop social science expertise in selected Indian universities and institutes, (iv) the Indian government's ambition to make planning democratic through citizen involvement, and (v) community development programs that sought to enable villages to meet plan targets and also teach villagers to become 'better' citizens of a young republic.

On April 14, 1956 at Parliament House in New Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the first national meeting of university planning forums. There were 132 delegates in attendance, representing 70 forums from 25 universities. The symbolic significance of this meeting to the Planning Commission was reflected in the profile of other attendees and participants at this two-day conference. They included the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, V.T. Krishnamachari; the Union Minister for Planning, G.L. Nanda; the Minister for Finance, C.D. Deshmukh; Chief Economic Adviser to the government, J.J. Anajaria; Secretary of the Planning Commission, Y.N. Sukthankar; the Deputy Minister for Planning S.N. Mishra (who was also Chairman, University Planning Forums); and two other members of the Planning Commission along with senior staff. This marked the beginning of a campaign by Nehru and the Indian government to enlist the support of the youth and intelligentsia in the task of national economic planning.

After independence in 1947, the Indian government had committed to centralized economic planning. The apex planning body – the Planning Commission - had been established in 1950, and the First Five Year Plan began the next year. The decision to marry parliamentary democracy and centralized economic planning was novel and signaled the Congress government's simultaneous commitment to liberal and socialist values. Official pronouncements on planning in India emphasized its commitment to “democratic planning”, explicitly distancing itself from planning in the Soviet Union. However, despite the pages devoted to public cooperation in plan documents, and the numerous speeches delivered by Nehru and other Ministers in the government, little effort had been made to actually encourage public participation. Furthermore, the government had not outlined in any detail the kind of participation it sought. In 1955, while the drafts of the Second Five Year Plan were under discussion, the government decided to take steps toward fulfilling the claims of ‘democratic planning’. This was done, not only because ‘democratic planning’ had begun to sound like empty

rhetoric, but also because it was realized that if future Five Year Plans were to succeed, it would require greater public participation as part of a concerted national effort. University planning forums were one prong among several in this strategy - others included celebrating Plan Day and Plan Week nationally, and setting up a national committee for plan promotion and publicity.

Planning forums sought to engage students and scholars in economic planning by offering an institutionalized avenue for participation. The functions envisaged for planning forums were numerous. The most modest ambition was for the forums to become bodies that would contribute in raising 'planning consciousness' in the country. They were to assist in spreading the word about Five Year Plans within colleges and universities through lectures, group discussions, and exhibitions. Each forum was also directed to adopt a village, where they would publicize the Plan and take up research projects, investigations, and data collecting surveys relating to the priorities of the Five Year Plan then underway. Forums were also asked to help in the national savings drive that the government had launched. The Planning Commission committed itself to providing all planning forums with documents relating to the formulation of Five Year Plans. The forums were expected to utilize this offering productively by studying, discussing, and debating it. The recommendations that resulted from this were to be fed up the tiered hierarchy of planning forums – from college to university to state committee to central committee to Planning Commission. This was meant to ensure a conversation between the Planning Commission and the nation's educated youth and intelligentsia. In theory, these forums could even influence the shape of the Five Year Plans.

With the funding I received from the History Project and INET, I travelled to New Delhi to consult archival and published sources in archives and libraries. At the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) I looked at the private papers of Jawaharlal Nehru, individuals associated with the Planning Commission – C. D. Deshmukh, T. T. Krishnamachari, P. C. Mahalanobis, Pitambar Pant,

V.K.R.V. Rao, Asoka Mitra - and the All India Congress Committee Papers. At the National Archives of India, I looked at the records of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Planning Commission, and the private papers of G. L. Nanda. I also consulted materials at the libraries of Central Secretariat and Yojana Bhavan for reports published by the Planning Commission and the Plan Publicity Committee associated with the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The material I collected during this research trip will contribute to a chapter in my dissertation. I also plan to use this research to write an article for a peer-reviewed journal on the subject of ‘democratic planning’ and ‘plan consciousness’ during India’s Second Five Year Plan (1956-61).