

Politics and Politicking: Need for a Change

Just when you thought that our state-building and nation-building processes are proceeding well and we are moving fast up the pecking order in the Comity of Nations, you have a slew of negative developments which shake your confidence. A look around the country presents the picture of a country under siege. Be it floods in Assam, terrorism and secessionism in Jammu and Kashmir, North--East or elsewhere in the country, communal riots in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere, Patel and Jat agitations in Gujarat or Haryana, simmering Naxal extremism in a good expanse of the country, problem of price rise, or the frequent resort to 'bandh' and 'strikes', we seem beset with problems from all around.

In all this, it is the common man who is the actual loser. It is this Homo Ordinarius who is really at loss, but is still managing to survive notwithstanding the mess he/she finds himself/herself in. And believe it or not, much of this mess is of our own making. Don't we support and elect the same feckless Homo Politicus with unceasing regularity, which has brought all this suffering to us through his/her political shenanigans and skulduggery. Just have a look at any problem around; it would appear that our political class is bent on suicidal one-upmanship and brinkmanship through which untold misery is wreaked on the hoi polloi.

Does our political class really think that a communal riot is politically rewarding? Does our political class believe it wins rich electoral dividends from communal conflicts at the hustings? And even if it so happens, it definitely does the entire system an irreparable damage. Has not every such communal riot boomeranged and been visited by another reactive communal flare-up and bombings, resulting in huge damage to man, materials and our image as the Salad Bowl of a well-knit Nation?

Notwithstanding the judicial ban placed on the instrumentality of 'bandh', the political parties continue resorting to the same putting forth sundry arguments in its favour, the principal one being its being the only potent weapon in the hands of the working class. The recent bandh against price rise actually helped the cause of price rise by stopping production and blocking supplies. Do we really think that we do not have any better means for securing workers' and citizens' right but for organizing a 'bandh', a general strike, a 'chakka jam', or

outright vandalism? Are we not hurting the interests of the same commoner in whose name we do all this? Surprisingly, many of these politicians agree and accept that these means are no longer relevant; still they fail to evolve a consensus to discontinue with the same.

Do the secessionists in Jammu and Kashmir, another mutant of our political class, really think that creation of a separate country or merger with Pakistan shall end all their problems? Had that been so, Pakistan should have been a developed and happy state by now. But Pakistan's failure to be so and her subsequent balkanisation proves in stark contrast the fallacy of such a concept. Today, with state's theoretical capacity to regulate and secure its borders steadily going down and when borders themselves are becoming irrelevant with more united regional groupings becoming a reality, we are still busy drawing more lines on the geographical map.

Coming back to the topic, as our next door neighbour has to shun and shed her day-dreaming about bleeding India through thousand cuts in her own better interests (has she not hurt herself more than India?), our political class also need to reinvent themselves. They need to ferret out better alternatives to a 'bandh', 'strike', 'chakka jam', or outright political violence either in the shape of a communal riot or in any other form. These means need to be positive and productive which neither hurt nor damage our property or the common citizens' right to carry on unhindered with their daily lives. They ought not to further sully our image as an emerging nation or twitches at our conscience of being the citizen of a country where such unwarranted and undesirables happen.

However, one still believes that India has been doing reasonably well compared to her many time twins in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. After all, many of these countries disintegrated before they could complete their state-building processes owing to the failure to resolve their internal conflicts. But India has so far gone from strength to strength to take her state-building and nation-building processes on a stronger footing through a consociation of social--welfare politics. But we would only pull wool over our eyes if we think we can continue doing so notwithstanding all the self-created roadblocks *en route*.

Our bloated obsession and fixation with the nine per cent growth rate is already getting deflated in the wake of looming global recession. Our desire to be a super power definitely does not gel with our capacities, motivation and determination to get to that elevated and rarefied space. What Brazil or China could showcase through the Olympic extravaganza was a sheer delight and one really doubts as to whether we could really replicate the same given an opportunity. The fact is that we have assigned a secondary place to the national pride which makes the warp and weft of a great nation.

Our political class takes to street at the slightest hint of a disagreement. That bandh and strikes are remnants from the past and are no longer relevant to the interests of our larger polity is something they refuse to understand. Can we really continue to stage our protest and opposition in the way we have been doing all these years. We should not forget that we are a democracy where every issue could be and should be discussed, debated, negotiated, and resolved across the table. But quite contrarily, our legislatures have become an arena for fisticuffs and one-to-one duel including outright sanguinary conflicts coming down to the lowest levels as seen in UP, West Bengal, and elsewhere in recent times.

The funny part in all this is that the behaviour of the same political party is different while in and out of power. A stand taken by a political party when in power may not be the same while out of power. Out here, the basic tenet of opposition politics seems to be opposition for the sake of opposition, without delving deep into the merit or demerit of the issue. To them, they are duty-bound to oppose and protest against any policy or idea emanating from the treasury benches.

The fact remains that ethics and values have taken a back seat out here. In their bid to attain their baser objectives, the political class does not mind weakening state institutions using whom they are supposed to tackle state problems. These institutions get weakened due to constant interference and tinkering and lose their capacity to respond in times of need. In fact, some elements of our political class are willing to compromise and do anything that can take them to the seat of power including colluding and conniving with the baser elements of the society be it criminals, terrorists or Naxals. Here, the hoi polloi is always on discount, the interest of the politicking elite is what matters most.

Is not it high time when our political class thought of better ways and means to conduct politics through? How long would we continue with the same antediluvian, horse and buggy methods of doing politics? If the politics is really supposed to be about welfare of the citizens of a polity, then we have got the very conception of politics itself goofed up. And unless and until our political class really does something about mending its ways, we better stop deluding ourselves to be one of the principal movers and shakers on the global scene. The citizens, too, have a duty to put such irresponsible political class in place. Otherwise, we shall cease to grow as a nation.

Salient Points

- A look around the country presents the picture of a country under siege.
- Despite the judicial ban on the instrumentality of 'bandh', the political parties continue resorting to the same putting forth sundry arguments in its favour.
- Today, When borders themselves are becoming irrelevant with more united regional groupings, we are still busy drawing more lines on geographical map.
- Our political class needs to reinvent itself by ferreting out better alternatives to a 'bandh', or outright political violence.
- India has been doing reasonably well compared to her many time twins in Asia, Africa and Latin America.
- Our desire to be a super power definitely does not gel with our capacities, motivation and determination.
- The fact is that we have assigned a secondary place to the national pride.
- A stand taken by a political party when in power may not be the same while out of power. Basic tenet of opposition politics seems to be opposition for the sake of opposition.
- Ethics and values have taken a back seat. In their bid to attain their baser objectives, the political class does not mind weakening state institutions.
- The citizens, too, have a duty to put such irresponsible political class in place.

Glossary

Feckless: incompetent

Shenanigans: a mischievous or deceitful trick, practice

Skulduggery: dishonourable proceedings

Hustings: any place from which political campaign speeches are made

Boomeranged: something, as a scheme or argument, that does injury to the originator

Sully: to soil, stain, or tarnish

Twitches: short movement

Consociation: the act of uniting in association

Rarefied: extremely high or elevated

Fisticuffs: to strike or fight with the fists

Sanguinary: bloody

Baser: foundation

Antediluvian: of or belonging to the period before the Flood

Goof up: a person who habitually makes mistakes, spoils things

Deluding: to mislead the mind or judgment