

## Tackling the Problem of Deinstitutionalisation in India

**T**he competitive party politics which forms the very pith and substance of an open, liberal-democratic system, has in all these years mobilised the teeming millions of this country and this mobilisation has been accompanied by a deinstitutionalisation process which has only worsened the problem further.

The problem of deinstitutionalisation has been noted and comprehensively discussed by the political scientists for quite some time which include people like Atul Kohli, Rajni Kothari, Sudipta Kaviraj, Partho Chatterjee, Paul Brass, Robert Stern and others. These scholars have noted as to how the political class in this country has been constantly chipping away at the various institutions of the system. The party system, bureaucracy, police, parliament, panchayati raj system, judiciary, and all other such institutions which should have been there for the smooth functioning of the system and to carry forward the developmental agenda, have all ended up emasculated at the altar of the political Moloch.

The institutions whose better functioning could have added to the strength of the leadership in the resolution of the sundry problems facing this society, their weakening only reinforces and aggravates those problems and leave us with no strength to deal with those problems. In their bid to harvest rich electoral dividends, the political class has not only compromised on the very democratic ethos which inform our constitutional structure, but they have also mobilised electorates on all those parochial and primordial grounds, which if stressed beyond a point could turn into the veritable Frankenstein's Monster which eventually devoured its own creator.

But the employment of narrow identities provide very convenient grounds for predicating politics in a society where different sections and regions are on different scales of development and where owing to corruption and such other reasons including the deinstitutionalisation of the system, leadership finds it difficult to attend to the real issues. Here, primordial identities and iniquitous developmental process provide easy fodder for the political machine. Ethical

degeneration further removes those pangs of conscience which could have acted as a barrier to such petty politics. Also, the very fact that our society is still very backward in more sense of the term, rooted deeply in its primeval identities and is not educated (the national literacy level still hovers around 77 per cent if a recent survey is to be believed) and aware enough as not to be preyed upon by the populism of the reckless politicians.

But as discussed above, there is nothing to be very despondent about. A country as huge and diverse as ours is bound to have many teething troubles before it competes its journey from a state–nation to a nation–state. India has always been a civilisation entity and has never existed as a state. As noted by many observers, even though the idea of Bharat, howsoever abstract, was always there, it was only in 1947 that India as a state was born and has since then been trying assiduously to transmogrify itself into a nation–state.

Its constitution was accordingly tailored to attain this end and by the hindsight one can say that it has stood us in good stead despite its various flaws. The kind of flexibility and adaptability it has shown to keep up with the times has only helped India's ontological problems to a great extent. India was fortunate enough, at least vis-à-vis her many time twins, to have a visionary leadership to start with, which was relatively committed enough to provide a solid foundation to the infant Indian State and their prolonged presence only helped the matters.

One feels that today slowly but steadily the Indian state is consolidating itself and the various problems it seems to be swamped with will go with time and the signs thereof are there for all to see. Over five decades of democratic existence has given birth to a lively civil society which spurred by the demonstration effect in the age of information and communication boom is spoiling for more. The revolution of rising expectation has been taking on various hues and expressing itself in such forms as the increasing assertions of the civil society aided by the instrumentalities of public interest litigations, activism by various non-governmental and civil society organisations led by conscientious societal leadership.

The homeostatic checks and balance mechanism has been slowly evolving and has prevented any particular interest or force to rule the roost in a manner as to threaten the flourishing of other interests or forces. And in a highly inegalitarian and hierarchised society like ours when the state fails in its duty, the people would naturally be left to their own resource. And in a competitive democratic political system, identity politics come very handy as that is the only resource people have in a system where heads count. By pooling their numerical strength, they try to compete with others in the political market place simultaneously trying for more value allocations in their favour. Scapegoating other communities or groups is only one of the many strategies employed by them to advance their interests and things like communalism and regionalism are the outcomes of such politics.

One strongly feels that the panchayati raj institutions aimed at the decentralisation of power would eventually see the percolation of power to the grass root and would lead to people developing a stake in the system and once this happens, Indian political system would no longer be a hostage to the whims and fancies of certain individuals in politics, bureaucracy or elsewhere. After all, someone has rightly said that you can fool some people all the time, all

the people for some time, but you can definitely not fool all the people all the time. The point is that there are so many interests operating in the society, that none would like to be left behind and in that scramble for power and increased share of the national pie, all operate in a way to check and balance each other. The activism by the civil society, judiciary and media is only one of many such expressions.

Notwithstanding many negative portents to our state-building process, the fact remains that we have only grown stronger over the years by successfully resolving many of our existential contradictions. A vibrantly functioning democracy with increasingly growing economy is sure to attain its deserved place on the global scene sooner than later. And there are plenty of signs corroborating this belief.

### Salient Points

- Political class in this country has been chipping away at the various democratic institutions of the system like the party system, bureaucracy, police, etc.
- For vote bank politics, the political class has compromised on the democratic ethos and has also mobilised electorates on parochial electoral gains.
- Ethical degeneration removes those pangs of conscience which could have acted as a barrier to such petty politics.
- It was only in 1947 that India as a state was born and has since then been trying assiduously to transmogrify itself into a nation-state.
- India was fortunate enough, at least vis-à-vis her many time twins, to have a visionary leadership to start with.
- In a highly inegalitarian and hierarchised society like ours when the state fails in its duty, the people would naturally be left to their own resource.
- Panchayati raj institutions aimed at the decentralisation of power would eventually see the percolation of power to the grass root.
- One can fool some people all the time, all the people for some time, but one can definitely not fool all the people all the time.
- We have only grown stronger over the years by successfully resolving many of our existential contradictions.

### Glossary

**Emasculate:** to weaken

**Moloch:** anything conceived of as requiring appalling sacrifice

**Roost:** a place for resting

**Portents:** an indication of something about to happen