

The Great Expectations in a Growing Nation

Notwithstanding many indicators and indices boding very well, these are, indeed, the testing times for our country. Even though our economy is booming and our stock markets are zooming, we are actually stationed at a crucial crossroads. And where do we go from here shall decide the course of our future.

While we never tire of boasting about us having the world's largest democracy, second largest population, third largest army, fourth largest economy (in purchasing power parity terms), fourth largest air force, fifth largest navy, sixth nuclear country and seventh largest industrialised country, the truth is also that beneath a seeming prosperity and success, we are faced with many systemic maladies which are expressing themselves in various ways. These include terrorist, secessionist and Naxalite violence, systemic corruption and institutional degeneration at various levels.

We are, today, one of world's most corrupt countries as told to us time and again by the ilks of Transparency International. Even though vigilance of an overactive civil society and judiciary led by conscientised citizens, non-governmental organisations and media does give us some hope, the fact remains that we actually don't know as to what might happen the next moment, whose bomb attack or violence some or many of us may fall prey to. Surprisingly enough, today we have guided missiles but misguided men out there to scupper their own boat for a few pieces of silver.

We all aspire to be a great power and as such hanker for such symbolisms as permanent membership of an almost defunct and toothless United Nations' Security Council and the recognition of an alien United States for legitimising our national nuclear programme, but we shall do almost nothing by way of our own character and behaviour that are becoming of citizens of a great country.. Believe it or not, our values and ethics are at an all-time low despite those stupendous growth figures.

Infused with a 'chalta hai' attitude, we do anything and everything that suit us and our interests but shall shy away by miles to do things that actually evince a strong character

behaving citizens of a great country. We resent a bandh or a strike, but shall not flinch from calling and participating in one such bandh, strike or procession when it suits us without any concern for others and, howsoever, detrimental the same may be to the interests of the system.

When it comes to burning social issues like those related to women, dowry, girl child and others, we make loud drawing room protestations but continue to do the reverse at home. Our excuse being that, 'it is the whole system which has to change. How will it matter if I alone forego my son's right to a dowry? So who is going to change the system? What does a system consist of? Very conveniently for us, it consists of our neighbours, other households, other cities, other communities and the government—but definitely not me and you. When it comes to us actually making a positive contribution to the system, we lock ourselves along with our families into a safe cocoon and look into the distance at countries far away and wait for a Mr. Clean to come along with a magic wand and work miracles for us with a majestic sweep of his hand or else we leave the country and run away.

Goaded by our Self, we run to America to bask in their glory and praise their system but again when New York becomes insecure (as in the aftermath of twin tower bombings), we run to England. Again, when England experiences unemployment, we take the next flight to the Gulf. When the Gulf is war struck, we demand to be rescued and brought home by the Indian government. Everybody is out to abuse and prostitute the country. Nobody thinks of feeding or nurturing the system. Our conscience is mortgaged to our selfish interests and we don't wish to look beyond them.

At times, we talk of the rich demographic dividends forthcoming from having about more than half our population in the productive age group of 25–50 by 2040 AD, but we are hardly bothered as to how to reap this dividend successfully. After all, unless and until we build and develop our human resources, what use they would be of. John Stuart Mill was right when he said that 'you cannot think of becoming a great country with small men' with small capacities, small thinking and dubious character.

While almost all of us keep whining about our government being inefficient, about our laws being too old or too bad, about our municipalities do not cleaning the streets, about our transport system being the worst in the world, about our mails never reaching their destination in time, and about our country having been gone to the dogs, turning into absolute pig sty. We keep on complaining and saying such things. But have we ever paused and thought as to what we do about them. John F Kennedy rightly said, 'ask not what the country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country'.

Just also notice the behavioural change of an Indian while in India and while abroad. When out of country, we are at our best. When at Singapore, we don't throw cigarette butts on the roads and we dutifully come back to the parking lot to punch our parking ticket if we have over-stayed there rather than sulking and trying to sneak away without payment as we often do in our own country.

Similarly, we don't dare to eat in public during Ramadan while in Dubai or we don't dare to go out without our head covered in Jeddah because the local laws demand that. We don't chuck

an empty coconut shell anywhere other than the garbage pail on the beaches in Australia and New Zealand nor do we spit paan on the streets of Tokyo. We also don't dare to speed beyond the stipulated limit in Washington DC and then try to get away with it by throwing our weight with the traffic cop

In America every dog owner has to clean up after his or her pet has done the job; same in Japan and many other countries. But we never do the same when in our own country. We expect the government to clean up but we are not going to stop throwing garbage all over the place nor are we going to stop to pick up a stray piece of paper and put it in the dust bin. We expect the railways to provide clean bathrooms but we are not going to learn the proper use of bathrooms. We want our Airlines to provide the best of food and toiletries but we are not going to stop pilfering at the first available opportunity.

We go to the polls to choose a government and after that we forsake everything, forgetting all our responsibilities and duties. We sit back wanting to be pampered and expect the government to do anything and everything whilst our own contribution is totally nil or, at times, even negative. We destroy our own national property during a bandh or a strike and then complain about government not doing enough.

We should realise that a country is made of people and unless and until its people, the basic constituents forming it, value themselves, their country, their rights and, more importantly, their duties, we shall continue to grovel in the dust. If our system is bad it is because we are bad. Mind you, we get the government we deserve. So we should first deserve and only then desire.

Salient Points

- Our values and ethics are at an all-time low despite stupendous growth figures.
- Today we have guided missiles but misguided men out.
- We all aspire to be a great power and become a permanent member of defunct UNSC but we shall do nothing that are becoming of citizens of a great country.
- When it comes to burning social issues like those related to women, dowry, etc. , we make loud drawing room protestations but do reverse at home.
- Our excuse being that, 'it is the whole system which has to change. How will it matter if I alone change.
- Our conscience is mortgaged to our selfish interests and we don't wish to look beyond them.
- John Stuart Mill rightly said "you cannot think of becoming a great country with small men'.
- John F Kennedy rightly said, 'ask not what the country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country'.
- We expect government to clean up but we do not stop throwing garbage openly.
- We go to the polls to choose a government and after that we forsake everything, forgetting all our responsibilities and duties.