



Indian Democracy: Signs of a Maturing Nation

Today, notwithstanding the instances of terrorism, secessionism, communalism, etc., the national integration seems to be steadily consolidating. There are many signs to that effect. The very fact that today the Indians all over the country enjoy the game of cricket and root for the Team India proves the fact that the 'imagined community' that Benedict Anderson talked of has slowly been evolving. Pokharan-II led to the same pan-Indian rejoicing. Kargil further corroborated this. And if there was any scruple left, the overwhelming response from across the country to a natural calamity anywhere in the country removes that.

Our political class may be very irresponsible, reckless, and unscrupulous, but when it comes to national integration, it has not compromised. The political class as a whole has come forward to secure and cushion the country from any onslaught to the national interests. All these are nothing but various expressions of a growing nation.

The apprehensions about growing religious fundamentalism in Indian society, despite being justified, would not be more than that. It is but an exercise symptomatic of competitive party politics where sans effective issues for popular mobilisation, the political class tends to fall back on easy resource for electoral mobilisation, howsoever unethical and unscrupulous that might be. And people answer to such calls because that appears to them to be the only hope or salvation amid the overall scenario of gloom and doom, and also as the only way to ameliorate their condition. Once a basic equity is achieved in resource allocation and once our human resources get educationally and cognitively enriched, there would be little scope for such parochial politics.

One hopes that in a better developed and more egalitarian Indian society, caste, religion, language, etc. would at best be only one of the various factors in politics and would not dominate the political skullduggery the way they do now. A section of the intelligentsia has also been apprehensive about the growing stature of such right-wing organisations in the country. But the point is what one could do about it? Can one think of banning such organisations or their

style of politics? Certainly not, more so in a democracy like ours. Banning or stigmatizing them would only aggravate the problems further. As someone rightly said about someone that it is better to have him in and spit out rather than have him out and spit in. So, our attempt should be at finding ways to restore them to the system. The massive membership of such an organisation, if positively channelled, could prove to be a great national asset. Also, if its membership starts reflecting all the constituent units of Indian population, then it would be all the better and one more step in our nation building exercise, but for that it would need to reinvent itself.

Notwithstanding all those apprehensions about right-wing parties in the country, they have greatly modified the content and style of their politics as they learnt only too well that with a confrontationist politics which excludes a major section of the Indian society, they could not hope to go very far. The way Indian society has become polarised lately, no political party can hope to form a government on its own accord. And for a party like the BJP, none would touch it even with a bargepole until it diluted its ideology and extremist political style. It is this modified politics which finally helped the BJP to gain power at the Centre, making it emerge as another effective alternative to the Indian National Congress. It also shows as to how the party system has been evolving in this country, with some stake-holders still exploring to form a Third Front as an alternative to both the principal national parties.

Having only one dominant political party could create its own problems as happened in the heydays of the Congress Raj. It could not only get complacent about the overall developmental project, but could also start developing a sense of invincibility which could make it irresponsible and autocratic enough as to endanger the very survival of the system. Here, one would quickly like to add that the bloated fear about the loss of the era of stable government is also unfounded. Stability is necessary but not a sufficient condition for socio-politico-economic development of the country.

And asked to choose between stability and responsibility, one would readily plump for the latter. A government with an absolute majority could become autocratic and conduct itself in an irresponsible way, but the constraints of a coalition government force it to behave responsibly. And that is what should matter more. And the multifarious forces would always be there to make it behave itself. Also, as long as there is a consensus on basic policies, instability should not be worrying. Since 1991, several governments have taken their turns at the Centre, but the basic policy has remained the same. Despite, all the rhetoric against the liberalisation and privatisation of the Indian economy, none has been able to reverse it.

So, even though the Indian nation state has been slowly emerging, consolidating and strengthening itself through the bumpy electoral politics in the world's largest democracy, one would like to enter several caveats here. We not only need our leadership to behave more responsibly than they have so far, playing ducks and drakes with the many opportunities provided. A dedicated, committed and responsible leadership with a vision is what this country sorely needs rather than just a nuclear muscle power. A leadership that fattens and grows at the expense of its people, which dwarfs its own people and erodes their capacities, would eventually discover that with pygmies (in terms of capacities) dotting the length and

breadth of the country, it can't make the country great. So, even while we liberalise and globalise our economy realizing a minimal state in the process, the same should not result in the complete withdrawal of the state from the social sectors. That is one lesson that we should learn from not only the developed countries, but also from our East Asian brethren, whose developmental achievements have been predicated on a healthy and educationally enriched human resources.

A democratic system runs on the principle of majority and a government that neglects this majority could not afford to rule longer, and thus, the sustainability of a polity which nixes the interests of the predominant majority also remains doubtful. Ergo, if liberalisation–privatisation–globalisation policy package has to continue, the Government has to cater to the basic needs of the predominant majority, otherwise the inegalitarianism which is said to be resulting since 1991 would finally not only reverse the entire process, but would also create fertile ground for social tension.

The Government, therefore, does not only need to spend massively in the social sector as the private sector cannot be expected to venture out there though they can be made to share the responsibility in various ways. The latter would not mind shouldering such a responsibility as a rich human resource and an affluent society are preconditions to its own sustained growth as the latter provides and creates the demands so crucial to it. The Government has also to see that it does not yield to the various forces within and without the country to withdraw from the social sector as it would do so at its own peril.

Also, our leadership has to do something about the institutional revival in the country and this has to be done in co-operation with the intelligentsia, media and the civil society. If all of them act in tandem, we would soon be living in a developed India, an India in keeping with the ideals, values and principles enshrined in our Constitution, an India all of us have cherished and yearned to live in.

Salient Points

- Cricket celebrations, Kargil war time solidarity, etc. show the national integration despite challenges of communalism, etc.
- Our political class may be irresponsible, reckless, and unscrupulous, but when it comes to national integration, it has not compromised.
- Once a basic equity is achieved in resource allocation and people get educated, there would be little scope for parochial politics through tools like religious fundamentalism.
- Having only one dominant political party could create its own problems as happened in the Congress Raj.
- Stability is necessary but not a sufficient condition for socio–politico–economic development of the country.
- As long as there is a consensus on basic policies, instability should not be worrying.
- A dedicated, committed and responsible leadership with a vision is what this country sorely needs.
- Even while we liberalise and globalise our economy, complete withdrawal of the state from the social sectors should not be done.
- Institutional revival in the country should be done in co-operation with the intelligentsia, media and the civil society.

Glossary

Scruple: a very small portion or amount

Skullduggery: an instance of dishonest or deceitful behavior

Bargepole: to refuse to have anything to do with

Dwarfs: a person of abnormally small stature owing to a pathological condition

Nix: Nothing