

Utterings of agonised Nation

Is our system a complete failure ?

If a party says that the Dalits and OBC's are oppressed and that they should be given special privileges, ignoring merit, it is vote-bank politics. If the Union government appoints a special commission for the Muslim, ignoring and neglecting other communities, it is also the example of vote-bank politics in India. For the last three decades India has been under increasing communal polarisation as a result of vote-bank politics pursued by the Central government. In India today the slumdog has to sleep hungry in terrible conditions while the millionaire leads luxurious life.

By G L Jalali

The other day I was sitting in the company of some retired persons, including retired bureaucrats and academics whose contribution to various fields in the course of their service period has been the most laudable and praise worthy one. In our usual tete-a-tete, somehow or other one of the participants- a retired mining engineer from Bihar- put me a searching question on the failure of parliamentary democracy in India. If democracy has failed, what alternative is there for us in India? Quizzed the bespectacled retired bureaucrat. It was really a difficult question for me to answer. If democracy has failed to take off in India since Independence, then the only option is replace it with the old order, asking old feudal lords, big Zamindars and Maharajas and Nawabs to rule over what I may say " Fragmented India ". That is mad-man's solution to the current ills dogging India. I think the best solution is to make ground congenial for the working of democracy in India. Even we need to reinterpret and redefine democracy that may suit a country like India where casteism has taken deep roots in our social order.

There is hardly any facet of our national that remains unaffected by casteist considerations. Politics in India is deeply mixed in casteism. The country will go to polls within a month or so. The nation's future will be shaped by the " ballot of a billion-plus voters in a process that should be over within a couple of months under the broad frame work of the constitution". For a " casteist and socially fragmented country like India, a stable government, at the centre possessing broad vision and nationalist overtone, is the need of the hour. We cannot afford to have any sort of political instability - like one in Pakistan- in our country which is well set on the path of economic progress-thanks to the resilience of 80% Hindu population.

For attaining political stability, we need " stable (political) parties with basically common manifestoes that conform to the national norms under the parameters of the constitution. For India is a People's Democratic Republic " (V.R. Krishna Iyer, The Hindu, March 9, 09). We have to see whether our political parties do really represent national interests and act in the larger interests of the country.

It has been our experience for the last three decades that almost all the political parties profess caste-loyalties to gain political milage. India's two populous states - Uttar Pradesh and Bihar- present a very grim picture of " caste-oriented politics ". Politicians in these two cow-belt states leave no stone unturned in giving an impetus to casteism, ignoring the broad cause of the nation. When we talk of People's Democratic Republic, it means a country that rises above petty loyalties and communal interests. While explaining the concept of People's Democratic Republic, Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, the architect of democracy in India,

addressed the Constituent Assembly thus " I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican, and am no believer in kings or princes or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry who have greater power over the kings of old, and where methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy. I recognise, however, that it may not be possible for a body constituted as is this National Congress, to adopt a full socialistic programme. But we must realise that the philosophy of socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society the world over and almost the only points in dispute are the pace and the methods of advance to its full realisation, India will have to go that way, too, if she seeks to end her poverty and inequality, though she may evolve her own methods and may adopt the ideal to the genius of her race " (quoted by V.R. Krishna Iyer)

The very vision of India, as enshrined in the Indian constitution, carries the following main characteristics :- 1) Casteless society 2) Theological pluralism 3) Secular polity 4) Democratic structure 5) Basic human rights 6) Socialist economy. 7) World peace 8) Cultural nationalism, with due emphasis on " rational thinking ". It was also the very vision of country's first Prime Minister whose philosophy is observed more in breach than in practice by the leaders of the party whose topmost stalwarts were both Nehru and Gandhi

Leaders like Pandit Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Subhash Bose etc. never thought in terms of one caste, one region or one religion, they thought in terms of the one nation and entire country.

The current situation is highly deplorable. According to a survey made by FAO, India is one of the world's poorest countries. Nearly 27 percent of the poor of the world live in India. Even the number of the world's richest person comes to 4 percent in India.

Literacy in India, is an " indispensable means for effective social and economic participation ", contributing to human resource development and reducing poverty in our country Education is also our fundamental right. According to the latest U.N. Survey, " India is one of the countries (along with the Arab states) where the literacy levels are below the threshold level of 75%. The number of illiterates in India today exceeds the population on the eve of Independence (1947). " Bulk of the illiterates is in rural areas where social and economic barriers play an important role in keeping the lowest strata of society illiterate ". For the success of democracy literacy is prerequisite in the underdeveloped countries like India. A literate person knows the value of vote whereas an illiterate person can " misuse his vote ". On an average ninety percent voters, who hail from backward rural areas, do not know the value of their ballot paper which can change the fate of the country. Elucidating the fault lines of our democratic order, V.R. Krishna Iyer remarks, " The governing class is oath-bound to uphold a socialist- secular-democratic Republic under the trinity of mantras: globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation ". But, sadly the governing class has often betrayed the voter.

The very politics of our country is governed by caste considerations. Many political parties in India openly indulge in caste-based vote bank politics. A number of leading political parties including Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), the Samaj Wadi Party (SWP) and Janata Dal, have often claims that they " are representing the backward classes " and rely mostly on OBC support. In fact all these parties are mixed in caste-politics that cuts deep at the root of Indian democracy.

The implementation of Mandal report by the erstwhile Prime Minister V.P. Singh was the saddest event for democracy in India. Apart from dividing 80 crore Hindu population of India, the Mandal report recommendations have fuelled caste rivalries in India. It has indirectly affected our political structure and sowed the seeds of discord, which is detrimental to the very cause of democracy in India.

Criminalisation of politics and massive corruption in public life has become a potent danger to world's latest democracy. Criminals rule the roost in the Hindi heart-land of India. In UP alone 50 per cent M L A's elected by the people are involved in criminal cases ranging from dacoity to murder. Some criminals, detained in jails, fought elections from the prison cell and won the elections. Among the major national parties, the BSP pranks fifth 42% criminals, the RJD with 38 per cent, the SP with 31 per cent, the CPI 30 per cent, the BJP 21 per cent, INC 18 per cent and the CPM 16 per cent. This clearly shows the rot with which the Indian polity is infected.

Corruption poses a big challenge before our democracy. The roots of corruption lie in the election expenses of the candidates. " As the candidates generally do not have so much money to spend on election, the funds usually come on the basis of quid pro quo from the business world or the underworld. Once the candidate becomes an MP, MLA, a Minister, he has to reciprocate to his donars in a big way. This is the root cause of political corruption " (Mukut Sah, The Tribune, Dec. 22, 2002). Generally corruption at the higher level trickles to the lower level in bureaucracy. Apart from the money-power, muscle power pollutes election which is the basis of democracy in India. We need urgent poll reforms to save democracy in our country.

It is beyond the capacity of a common man or woman to fight elections and combat " Mafiaism that has taken deep roots in most of the northern states in India. The other day we viewed a TV footage, showing Samajwadi leaders distributing currency notes to voters in the presence of Samajwadi Supremo Mulayam Singh Yadav. Election Commission has slapped a notice on Mulayam Singh Yadav for the distribution of cash in UP among his voters. We have to watch keenly what further action Election Commission may take against the culprit.

B.G. Verghese remarks, "of course, electoral politics is not the sole reason for the criminalisation of politics. The lure of money and the role of the vested interests are among other reasons. Nevertheless, many analysts believe that the electoral process is a major fount of corruption and criminalisation in the country. Gaining beverage on politicians has become the road to community, if not power" . It is now known to every body that a number of elected representatives to local bodies, state legislature and even Parliament are persons of unsavory reputation, some of them hardened criminals ". Even some of central ministers are allegedly involved in criminal and corruption cases. A couple of years ago the Supreme Court of India ordered that the candidates, seeking election to state legislatures and Parliament should disclose their assets and source of income at the time of filing their nomination papers. But the politicians did not disclose their income and the criminal cases pending before them in the law courts. India's political class is not sincere in its designs.

Caste and communal factors, coupled with the feudal mindsets, are largely instrumental "in subverting democratic norms and restraints ". We know that democracy is a precious gift to be squandered or subverted by criminals who pose as the saviour of democracy and secularism.

Vote bank politics is the bane of Indian political system. It may be defined as a "political strategy in which politician or party concentrates on the well being of just one particular group of people to win elections, caring least for other groups or the country". In other words vote bank politics is divisive politics. It motivates voter to vote on the base of narrow communal lines. The worst vote bank card was played by the Congress in the Shah Bano case. If a party says that the Dalits and OBC's are oppressed and that they should be given special privileges, ignoring merit, it is nothing but vote-bank politics. If the Union government appoints a special Commission for the Muslims, it is also the worst example of vote-bank politics to garner the votes of the Muslim community in India.

For the last three decades " India has been under increasing communal polarisation "as a result of the politics pursued by the central government from time to time. India is a secular state which means" a state constitutionally not connected with a particular religion ". Our India is the largest democracy in the world. It is the cradle of several major world religions with majority 82 per cent Hindus (of which 25 per cent are Dalits and Tribals), 12.12 per cent Muslims, 2.34% per cent Christians (predominantly in North-eastern states and Kerala), 1.94 per cent Sikhs, 0.76 per cent Neo-Buddhists (mostly Dalits), 0.40 per cent Jains. India needs harmony. Communal politics is cutting deep at the roots of our nationhood. "In India today the slumdog has to sleep hungry in terrible conditions. While the millionaire remains in luminous places. Swaraj India has betrayed Gandhi and Nehru....." (V.R. Krishna Iyer, The Hindu, March 9 , 2009).