

ELECTIONS ARE FOR PARLIAMENT NOT FOR CONSTITUENCIES OR PARTIES

We need, Members of Parliament, not of constituencies but to represent the Nation, not to indulge in vocal magnum battles to earn more emoluments and power but fighters for common good of the country.

Parliament elections are coming close upon the nation. Elections prove that periodically the little Indian matters. Winston Churchill wrote:

‘At the bottom of all the tributes paid to democracy is the little man walking into the little booth with a little pencil, making a little cross on a little bit of paper. No amount of rhetoric or voluminous discussion can possibly diminish the overwhelming importance of that point’.

Abraham Lincoln spoke for humanity’s democracy which applies not merely to United States but to every nation in the democratic cosmos. India is a democracy which is at once socialist and secular and therefore humanist. But we are no longer free, 60 years after independence because today elections are fought with huge Goebellian propaganda, Himalayan publicity, purchasing constituencies with money power. The little man, and worse, the little woman matters little. Members of Parliament matter even if they vote after receiving money.

The court has held—strange justice—MPs receiving money is gross corruption, immoral and outrage; but that it does not disqualify them or render culpable corruption of members inside the House which is immune to judicial scrutiny. This means that the rich man, the creamy layer, can win any policy or confidence of a Prime Minister by cash because the MPs are free despite found guilty of criminal conduct. Naturally, candidates are set up with huge investments and colossal publicity and after receiving criminal cash and cast vote in Parliament. Political parties can be controlled by the proprietariat. Parties therefore receive huge money for power and lucre and those who are hungry, the have-nots, are denied the dignified right to life and they are ignored because the majority votes goes to him who buys at fancy price. The time has come to stop the scramble for power by micro parties financed by rich vested interests as they defeat the conscience of the nation. The principle of democracy in a country like India where the majority is poor but a few are fabulously affluent has to be guarded most carefully! Unfortunately today, Parliament belongs to the extravagant wealthy mafia and they govern the country. This is slavery, not free government based on the principle neither of freedom nor by powerful debate. The finest hour of debated decision in the House is defeated by reason being buried and cash counts. This shall not be. We must restore the confidence of the vast poor people in Parliament by a revolution of politics by militant consciousness of the masses to establish what Burke had declared long ago:

“Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that

of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not member of Bristol, but he is a member of parliament”.

Sadly, today debate has become alien and all sound and fury and even violent gestures dominate decisions which our Speaker Somnath Chatterjee denounced. What an unhappy deterioration. What Winston Churchill spoke of the British Commons does not hold good in our two houses. After a great debate on a motion of no confidence at a critical hour in the battle for Britain against Hitler’s barbarian hordes he replied in the House with passion. Let me quote him:

"Everything that could be thought of or raked up has been used to weaken confidence in the Government, has been used to prove that Ministers are incompetent and to weaken their confidence in themselves, to make the Army distrust the backing it is getting from the civil power, to make the workmen lose confidence in the weapons they are striving so hard to make, to present the Government as a set of nonentities over whom the Prime Minister towers, and then to undermine him in his own heart, and, if possible, before the eyes of the nation. All this poured out by cable and radio to all parts of the world, to the distress of all our friends and to the delight of all our foes. I am in favour of this freedom, which no other country would use, or care to use in times of mortal peril such as those which we are passing."

Every candidate and Party is bound by provisions of the Constitution in our paramount law. There are clear provisions which answer all the requirements of a manifesto. No candidate can ask for a vote if his manifesto departs from the Constitutional provisions. The Election Commission should insist on demanding from every party and from every independent candidate to produce its or his manifesto. If this contradicts any of the articles of the Constitution, the candidates or the party should be disqualified from contesting the elections. The Election Commission is not a ritualistic agency but has a dynamic, dialectical duty as an instrumentality charged with the protection of the reality and supremacy of the Constitution. The Preamble is an integral part of the Constitution and declares a pledge that our Republic is socialist, secular, democratic and egalitarian. With social and economic justice as a feature of the basic structure, Nehru emphasized the importance of the public sector. Indira Gandhi made mandatory provisions for nationalization and abolition of princely privy purses. Any privatization measure or boosting of capitalist investments, exotic or native, whatever the pretext, is contrary to socialism and egalitarianism. Unfortunately, today we have molar political parties, unblushingly communal and controlled by the creamy layer of the upper classes. The Election Commission has the invigilation and investigative duty to scrutinize these matters. Alcoholism has to be moderate and compassion for all living creatures and environmental concern are constitutional duties. Industrialists who pollute the earth, air and water and even the ultrasound layers, should be forbidden from funding or participation in elections. Regrettably, many parties flourish on donations from polluting investments and technologies. In the absence of an undertaking to the contrary,

parties and candidates who accept such donations should be debarred. The Constitution is paramount and the Election Commission is its instrument.

In short, the scrutiny of candidatures and the duty of the objectors at the Returning Officer's examination is not a mere mechanical role but a high risk operation and intelligent and informed opposition is necessary make the elections a frugal affair and consistent with our socialist secular character and strictly in conformity with the constitutional provisions. The Left parties have a special duty to exercise their role from this angle and their performance should be not merely a platitude or struggle to get seats but an elaborate exercise to make our public life conform to the details of the manifesto implicit in the Constitution. This is not done now. A strenuous conscientisation of the community as a whole has to be undertaken so that the polling process may have a cleaning dimension to make the Judiciary, the Executive and the Legislature ensure the reality of the value of the Constitution.

Before I conclude on the mandatory dimensions expected in the manifesto of every party and candidate and the functions of the Returning Officer, I must emphasise the need for imperative specification of religious comity which flows from our plurality of faith. Today, in this country, religion and institutions advocating devotion have become Big Business. This has to stop. Similarly educational and health institutions are huge communal operations rooted in profit-making and is privatized. Big Business has become unethically commercialized. Hospitals where health should be the only concern, is today Big Business. All these are contrary to the essentials of our socialist secular democratic Republic. But today our governments are hell bent on privatization of public functions. Industrialization has become a craze even if it violates the Directive Principles of Part IV of the Constitution. Women power, child rights, old age rights through geriatrics, pediatrics and healthy biosphere demand the active support of the poll process. Elections are not a mere matter of ballots but a comprehensive operation whereby the life of the nation commands a true transformation fine-tuned to the values of the Constitution. This is the high responsibility of all political parties and it is mandatory but missed all together. To fail here is to betray the national obligations which every MP and every public official swear by the Constitution. Even the judiciary is no exemption to the obligation to uphold the Constitutional mandate. If 'We the people of India 'are to be the masters of governance, the Constitution cannot be a futility but must govern every aspect of public life, private life and the directive principles of state policy must govern every aspect of our national life. Such is the basic nature of a truly democratic parliamentary election when the nation fulfills its fundamental subjection to the suprema lex. Remember, we are expounding a Constitution, not clauses in an insurance contract or a trade deal. The full semantics of the large and creative functions of a general election needs a new interpretation, a fresh national debate and inquest. Are we proud or patriotic about our Constitution? These elections have larger, deeper inquisitorial operations.

Is swaraj the militant struggle for freedom of the billion Indians still relevant? Are Gandhi and his policies of truth and non-violence obliterated from state policies? Does Nehru matter at all to Manmohan Singh and Chidambaram? Is Indira Gandhi with her nationalization perspective and land reform policy relevant to the present Government at

the Centre or even the Marxist party in power? Does Bush whose jurisprudence and international relations are contrary to Nehru's peace policy still find a follower in the Central Cabinet of Manmohan Singh? The general elections to Parliament must answer these questions.

After all, Parliament of the Westminster pattern is the grand inquest of the nation which has power to debate on all matters under the Constitution. How can we allow illiterate incompetent goondas and extremists to perform this function of inquest? If we fail in this task, elections become a grand failure.

Today viewing parliament's performance after several elections, it is clear that we have reached downhill and proved that the politician justifies Bernard Shaw's cynicism: "he knows nothing, he thinks he knows everything; that clearly points to a political career". Another quotation from Bernard Shaw also should make us think: "Democracy substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few".

My purpose in this essay is to present a new focus, a new paradigm, a new accountability, a new challenge and a new vision so that new criteria may be applied by the parties in choosing candidates. The choice should be such as to make our Parliament a relevant national institution, truly a grand inquest of the nation in 2009. Our Houses are not a bedlam and our deputies are not there to run to the Well of the House or go berserk. The Humble Speaker's valuable time and energy are not to be devoted entirely to correcting delinquent, unruly elements. As a nation with Gandhi and discipline and Peruvian elegance and India's sense of power and restraint, our Parliament should project to the world through the proceedings which are broadcast a nation which is purposefully devoted to creating a new future for its people. Imagine our Parliament to be an Assembly of extremist terrorists, not enlightened lawmakers. We must ensure that our Houses are not a dysfunctional anarchy, no chaos on the cosmos of our nation, but a powerful, orderly House where business of the nation is transacted with the traditions of 5000 years of culture.

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