

Democracy does deliver, but...

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“Democracy can deliver...has delivered” was the refrain of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s speech at the UNGA some three weeks ago. In support of his averment, he quoted his own rise to prime ministership and also laid before the sparse audience the achievements of his government. Such a projection of the Indian democracy was indeed needed because of the all-out attacks from vested interests in the world. The western media, for example, given to the habit of making mountain out of a molehill whenever it spots an opportunity to tarnish India’s image presented this particular event as a case of political grandstanding on Modi’s part! At home, the speech should provide us an opportunity to mull over the state of democracy here.

For the smooth and effective functioning of democracy, it is enjoined upon the three pillars of legislature, judiciary and executive to safeguard individual liberty and equality besides ensuring that the state functions as a welfare state where social and economic justice is available. For the smooth working of democracy, we also require an enlightened electorate and responsible political parties. A country, in which a large segment of population is poor and ignorant, the duty to teach them the right kind of lessons in democracy devolves on political parties. While they are fluent in tall talk, the practical aspect leaves much to be desired.

When they take the meaning of opposition party to oppose only, even if it goes against facts and logic, it does not gel well with the democratic system. Their only goal is to convince the electorate somehow to get votes and in a country like ours, it is not difficult to sway emotions because public does not have access to or is unable to interpret facts correctly on its own. In such a situation, democracy can get derailed. Take for example, the current farmers’ agitation. It is surprising to see parties going back on their own commitments mentioned in their election manifestoes to abrogate the colonial-era mandi system that presents impediment in the path of farmers’ profits. Now that the government has taken steps to implement this promise, the opposition parties have taken a different position and are fanning the protests.

Taking up the objectives of a democracy, equality of all citizens is a cardinal principle. But the myopic vision of the present-day opposition parties is out on display whenever there are incidents involving people of one religious denomination or the other. Strangely enough, minority appeasement marks even the communist parties, which theoretically

disavow religion. Heinous crimes like terror too get refracted through this lens. While the death of farmers at Lakhimpur Kheri is being highlighted, the BJP workers killed there have not got similar treatment. Where will this biased approach take us all in the long run does not seem to concern them.

Liberty is another parameter, on which democracy is tested. But the demand to have unhindered liberty even if it means blocking highways and making lives of innocent citizens miserable or raising slogans to break India is nothing short of blasphemy in a democracy. The question naturally comes to mind if it was wrong on the part of patriots like Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh, Ashfaqullah and countless others who forsook their and their families' interests and laid down their life to secure independence of the country? Is it now the duty of the armed forces only to attain martyrdom while saving the country from terrorists and enemies? What if they too take a cue from these self-serving politicians and forget the patriotic values for some allurements? Winston Churchill had once said, "When there is no enemy within, the enemies outside cannot hurt you." How true!

All these blessings of a democratic order are possible if the country is independent, sovereign and secure. Surrounded by enemies like China and Pakistan, we need to create a discourse that makes India unified and strong. Picking up minor issues or interpreting incidents in a biased manner will harm the country in the long run. A recent example is the total misreading of the extension of jurisdiction of BSF to 50 km, which was pronounced as the infringement of federal structure and an AAP leader in a sarcastic response taunted the Punjab CM as having given away half the state to Modi! Compare this to AAP supremo Kejriwal's chest-thumping in TV ads about making every child a patriot through education! The left hand does not know what the right is doing, or is there a method in the madness?

We are fast acquiring the image of a fractious society in which everybody suspects everyone else as an enemy and for this, the manipulation of the democratic system by self-serving leaders is to blame. In this, a section of the BJP is also blameworthy. Even though Prime Minister Modi pontificated at the UN about our diversity being our identity, we must not be deluded. There is urgent need to rise above mundane considerations and like true patriots, have convergence of opinion on social, economic and political issues. Adam Smith cautioned long back: "Remember, democracy never lasts long. It soon wastes, exhausts and murders itself. There never was a democracy yet that did not commit suicide."

END OF ARTICLE

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