

Dil waalon ki Dilli must never shut its doors

 [thestatesman.com/opinion/dil-waalon-ki-dilli-must-never-shut-its-doors-1503351956.html](https://www.thestatesman.com/opinion/dil-waalon-ki-dilli-must-never-shut-its-doors-1503351956.html)

October 10, 2024

Opinion

Few will remember a contest organised by the Delhi Government in 2013 inviting taglines that captured the essence of Delhi.

Govind Singh | New Delhi | October 10, 2024 8:24 am | Updated : October 11, 2024 7:56 pm

(Photo:SNS)

Few will remember a contest organised by the Delhi Government in 2013 inviting taglines that captured the essence of Delhi. Still fewer may remember the winning entry, dildaar Dilli (magnanimous Delhi), selected to boost tourism in the national capital. Interestingly, “magnanimity” was found to be a common element among the over 12,000 entries received for this contest. The poetic expression dil waalon ki Dilli (Delhi belongs to the big-hearted) had clearly made its way into the hearts and minds of people.

While announcing the winning entry, the then Chief Minister Sheila Dixit had aptly summarized the greatest identity of Delhi to be how it accepts everyone as family. Delhi is the national capital of the world's largest democracy. Democracies work when power is vested in the people and the voices of the people are heard, acknowledged and reciprocated. In a federal structure like ours, if a state government is unable to address the concerns of the people, Delhi becomes the obvious choice of destination for being heard. For matters of the union territories and when the Union Government makes the laws, Delhi is the only choice of destination for making a representation for change.

It therefore becomes the responsibility of the Union and the Delhi Government to provide unfettered access and space to all democratic voices reaching Delhi. The recent detention of environmental activist and innovator Sonam Wangchuk at the Delhi-Haryana border is worrisome. Wangchuk led a month-long "Delhi chalo padyatra" (foot march to Delhi) starting from Leh, to urge the Union Government for safeguarding the future of Ladakh. But far from the government receiving this civil society delegation, Sonam Wangchuk was not even allowed to enter Delhi.



His release from detention became possible only after a complete shutdown protest in Ladakh. The blatant refusal of Delhi to provide space and audience for a representation from Ladakh has been called out as undemocratic and also undignified behaviour. The Delhi magnanimity that has been lost in the process must be restored and Wangchuk must be provided due support to demonstrate his representation in the national capital. Wangchuk's detention is worrisome on more than one account.

As an environmental activist representing a region highly vulnerable to global warming, Wangchuk's petition is that of survival. It highlights the existential crisis faced by the people of Ladakh. The climate change action plan of the Ladakh Administration brings forward the many threats posed by climate change to human health in the region. The policy changes requested by Wangchuk are so critical that some of them, like inclusion of Ladakh in the sixth schedule, have been promised by the ruling political party itself. The inclusion of Ladakh in the sixth schedule of the Indian constitution will provide it some degree of autonomy.

This is required for preserving the unique cultural and traditional practices of tribal dominated Ladakh. It will also promote community leadership towards longterm sustainability of Ladakh and help in combating climate change with local solutions. The delay in inclusion of Ladakh in the sixth schedule of the Constitution of India is a key grievance of the local people. Climate change has emerged as the most pressing environmental challenge of this century and the Government has already taken several

initiatives for combating it. India's pledge to reduce GHG emissions intensity of GDP by 45 per cent by 2030 and becoming a net-zero economy by 2070 are landmark targets for a developing country. India's Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment) is nudging individuals and community action for environmental protection across the globe.

At the heart of India's green transition is a sustainable value system embodied in our culture. And Wangchuk's petition is to protect and preserve this very culture – as it stands today – by empowering local communities through provisions available in the Constitution of India. A key challenge in promoting community-based conservation is lack of community leadership. Wangchuk has successfully mobilized the people of Ladakh for sustainable conservation through his words and actions.

Marching to Delhi was not his first choice but is preceded by peaceful demonstrations in Ladakh for protecting fragile ecosystems and disappearing glaciers. His innovations in eco-friendly construction and sustainable water management are noteworthy. Far from being detained, Wangchuk's work in Ladakh should be acknowledged as a model for other vulnerable regions to emulate. It is this national recognition and capacity building role that Delhi must play if it wants to retain its true leadership character.

All democratic governments who rule from Delhi must be open to receiving citizens' petitions, acknowledging and respecting them in the process. They must also go beyond their constitutional responsibility to ensure inclusive and sustainable development of the country. This is the essential requirement for India to uphold its status as a global beacon of democracy.

(The writer is associate professor at Jindal School of Environment & Sustainability, O.P. Jindal Global University, Haryana, India.)