

Merit is the only means to make India a developed nation

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Making India a developed nation by 2047 is high on the agenda of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. For this purpose, public opinion as also the views of experts and scholars are being sought at different fora. A few days ago, the meeting halls of every Raj Bhavan in the state capitals were abuzz with the discussions on the theme of how to realise the vision of making India a developed nation by 2047, and the discussants were the vice chancellors of all the universities – public and private – functioning in the respective state. PM Modi addressed the online gathering and thereafter followed discussions in the presence of the governor.

There were a large number of suggestions put forth by the participants. What one could gather was that of all the approaches, the one that places a premium on merit can only lead us to the desired goal. In this age of global competition in every field, excellence and not mediocrity will work. Governments at the centre and in the states must motivate people and cultivate in them the desire and the will-power to achieve higher goals. If a government lets people fall into the habit of harbouring pipedreams of luxury and comfort without earning them honestly and diligently, then it will be a sure recipe for disaster.

It is not only valid in the field of education where a student who scores more is placed above the one who scores less, even if by the fraction of a unit. The merit-based model must guide all aspects of personal, social and national activity because no nation ever progressed and stayed on top through short-cuts. Merit demands character and is not compatible with any sign of dishonesty. Unfortunately, in our country, the odds against this approach are many. In the matter of governance in a democracy like ours, these are euphemistically referred to as political compulsions.

We see such instances in a highly politicised state like Haryana, where a large number of people help their children to use unfair means to pass exams and when they get a degree, the parents would approach their known politicians to get the children government jobs, thereby filling the administration with incompetent workforce. Politicians are, of course, to blame for encouraging this type of nepotism and favouritism. But then there are many other forms of corrupt practices which they use to lure people to get votes at the hustings. Come the election season, and there is a kind of cut-throat competition among political parties in power to deliver freebies of all types – free ration, laptops, bicycles, scooters, kitchen appliances and what not! If the parties are not in power and are fighting for it, then they can promise the moon, even if that means wrecking the economy of the state which will ultimately make life harder for the general public with higher taxes and prices of commodities or services.

Populist policies in the form of reservations on political rather than genuine grounds have set off demands for benefits, based on this approach, from more and more segments of population to be considered backward of one type or the other. A rational strategy to uplift the downtrodden sections is to provide them facilities for free education as is being done in some states in setting up of free coaching centres for students to compete for some competitive exams. Free doles must be the last resort in case of extreme poverty and resourcelessness, because if done otherwise, we simply tend to make people unproductive instead of making them self-reliant, thereby taking the nation a notch higher on the scale.

Merit gets cancelled through activities like betting and gambling which are now being widely promoted through television and digital apps, as these inculcate wrong habits in making people shun hard work, lose touch with reality and live in a dreamland. Numerous households have been wrecked and a large number of people commit suicides so often. The younger generation and even minor children are getting addicted to this activity in the false hope of raking in big money. The government is treating opening of gambling on this scale like it threw open liquor shops to avoid people dying from booze, but here it is the case of inculcating the right mindset that does not depend on luck. Online gambling may be bringing in sizable revenue to the government, but it would be at a great expense for the future of the youth and the country.

Former President APJ Abdul Kalam had also envisioned India as a developed nation by the year 2020 as advocated by him in his book *India: Vision 2020* published in 1998. He was not in the driving seat and all that he could do was to sound a wake-up call, pointing out what other countries had done and underlining the lesson that the national characteristic of these countries was “to recognize the best and to get the best out of the best”. (p. 29). Kalam himself worked hard to bring to the notice of different states the agendas for their development based on thorough study of their potentials and challenges. PM Modi seems to be following the same approach of setting the goal at a reasonably future date, working out plans for region-wise development and maintaining a strict eye on performance of different ministries. There are numerous pitfalls in the form of ‘political compulsions’ as discussed

above. One only hopes that people at large would comprehend the current reality and brace up to face the future with will power to excel through hard work and not wait for dame luck to smile.

END OF ARTICLE

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