

India Today

POINTS TO DEVELOP

India as an independent modern state not long in existence in terms of historical time, but enough for us to form an assessment

Both positive and negative features in the polity, economy, and social sector.

Real freedom out of reach for many; 'rights' more on paper than in reality. ,

Cynicism in large sections of the population-a dangerous feature

Values have eroded

Time to renew our tryst with destiny.

India as an independent modern state has not been in existence for even for a century, but it has been there long enough for us to pause and try to assess what has been achieved since we won freedom from an alien rule. Today India appears to be a bundle of contradictions, a mixture of the good, the bad and the indifferent. We see a coexistence of positive achievements and negative features.

As a political entity we have survived several problems of transition, coped with the biggest ever refugee exodus in all history in the wake of partition, taken in our stride political assassinations; we have managed to continue as a democratic republic whose Constitution has stood the test of time. This is not a meagre achievement if we look at many of the nations in Asia and Africa. How many of these have managed to retain their democratic-republic status and not succumbed to a military or other coup since getting liberated?

In the economic field none can deny that the much-maligned planned development policies have achieved some good. A sound industrial and agricultural base, growth in national and per capita incomes, increase in skilled manpower are all the positive achievements. The gradual Opening up of the economy to the private sector has helped the economy to grow all the more.

Scientific and technological research too has progressed. We have to our credit the creation of several hybrid seeds, irrigation systems, development of nuclear power infrastructure, space applications, ocean research and computer systems.

On the social front, some improvement is seen in educational level, equity and health. Women have entered the job market and made steady progress towards top posts.

The other side of the picture, the dark negative side, however threatens to eclipse the positive aspect.

Democracy has survived but it appears to be precariously placed. The quality of that democracy leaves much to be desired.

Economic development has not been uniform, nor is there an equitable distribution of the fruits of development. The huge increase in population has practically neutralised gains. Unemployment is high, prices have increased immensely, and our external debt is threatening to place us in a debt trap.

Has the average individual really enjoyed freedom-, freedom from want, from fear, from injustice? Women in India still feel guilty about having rights, feel scared to go out alone, are paid less than their male counterparts for the same work. Child labour and bonded labour continue. Oppression of the downtrodden has not ceased. People fear the officer of law instead of trusting him. Perhaps, it is underdevelopment and disparity that are at the root of ills like communalism, separatism, casteism and obscurantist ideas. Perhaps, it is the lack of grassroots democracy, lack of spread of education, a withdrawal of rights from the people by those in power that are the causes of massive illiteracy, unemployment and poverty on the one hand and the brain drain of scientists and trained personnel on the other. Politics and government service have ceased to be fields of public 'service'; they are seen as means to power and pelf. Corruption at all levels has compounded matters. There is a dangerous sense of disillusionment and cynicism in people at large.

Change and development are integral to any dynamic society. Thus, we see today a growth of 'special interest' groups into autonomous parties demanding greater freedom for different regions. Their impact has been striking enough to make the 'national' parties seek alliances with the regional forces. Liberalisation of the economy is also part of this change. Reforms have become necessary even though many yet feel self-reliance in Some sectors is unavoidable.

The erosion of values, however, is a disturbing change for the worse. Even more shocking than the actual scams is the public apathy to it all; corruption is accepted as a fact of life and has ceased to offend public susceptibilities. Institutions have been steadily disfigured, even defiled. All this is a far cry from the dream of democracy and egalitarian society that the freedom fighters saw in the 1947-50 period. The worrisome features are: the rise of fundamentalism, the

pandering to caste instead of overcoming it, the appalling corruption and the refusal of the state to enforce the law.

When things appear at their bleakest, however, a glimmer of hope appears: the news of an upright officer, a politician of principle, judicial decisions that meet the public's wishes, achievements on the cultural or scientific front. All, one is led to believe, is not lost. We need to rebuild our value system, work for a larger ideal than merely satisfying personal needs. We must renew our tryst with destiny if the coming years of India's freedom are to be much brighter than the last many years.