

Delineating the Contours of Indian Polity

Just when you think everything in this country is going right, one or the other negative development seems to send everything into tizzy. Even the feel-good factor created by the recently passed Goods and Services Act seems to have evaporated if trends at the economy suggest anything. And again the prophets of doom have started bawling, screaming blue murder over the systemic degeneration, which has set in this country. And they say that all the negative political and economic developments are nothing but symptomatic of the overall crisis afflicting this country.

Things like corruption, nepotism, communalism, linguistic fanaticism, terrorism, infra-nationalism, secessionism, and all other such cognate problems go on to show that unless something is done urgently, the very survival of this country is doubtful. But wait, do our intelligentsia and think tanks really need to get so down in the dumps. Well, like Dr. Pangloss, the overoptimistic fictional character in Voltaire's classical work, 'Candide', I don't think so. Undoubtedly, measures need to be taken to stem the creeping rot, but there is nothing so untoward or unnatural with the overall scenario, as to shadow this country's very existence.

When India commenced its odyssey as a state-nation way back in 1947, there were many naysayers believing that a country as diverse and huge as India would disintegrate sooner than later. Leading the juggernaut was Selig Harrison who predicted India's balkanisation, but India hurtled on tiding over many crises which *inter alia* included offensive designs on her territories by the hostile neighbours and rise of authoritarian tendencies reflected in the imposition of emergency on the 26th of June, 1975. But a nascent nation fought back and was back on the rails with a reinvigorated desire to survive despite all odds.

The people who were relentless in pouring vitriol on the parliamentary democracy of the country were on the back foot now. These gentlemen believed that an illiterate, indigent and gargantuan India needed an iron hand to be ruled effectively rather than a kid-gloved democracy. But they definitely seem to have been overwhelmed by amnesia because the very fact that they enjoyed the right to freely spout such nostrums from the rarefied rostrums was

because of the democracy and once they were stripped of the same rights, they realised the importance of democracy and were quick to demand *status quo ante*.

In fact, while vetting something as important as a country's development and survival, one should keep into mind her capacities, constraints, liabilities, strengths, and assets while simultaneously trying to avoid odious comparisons. So, while talking about India's developmental march from state-nation to nation-state, one should not compare its status with the First World countries like the United States and the United Kingdom, though they should always be held as a beacon, as a milestone to be achieved, at least, in some respects.

So, when India earned her freedom on that fateful day of the 15th of August, 1947, she had not only inherited an emaciated economy from her colonial rulers, her social fabric was also in tatters. A country with a very low industrial base, a huge population with very poor social and physical infrastructure and an agriculturally dependent country was still trying to delineate the contours of her identity. And she was not alone. There were scores of other countries in Asia, Africa, Europe and Americas who had just won their freedom from imperial thralldom and were on the same developmental scale as India. And when compared with these countries, India appears to be a clear winner.

As these countries scurried forward in the developmental rat-race, many of them fell by the wayside, compromising the very principles, values and ideals they had cherished during their struggle for independence. So, when military take-overs, *coup d'état*, and authoritarianism seemed to be the order of the day, India continued as an island of hope where democracy, howsoever boisterous and unruly, continued to flourish and was successful in escaping the occasional sparks flying in the air. It not only successfully overcame the emergency monster, but was also able to overcome the Hindu rate of economic growth charting an independent course of economic development in the choppy waters of the Cold War days.

One may argue that after all these assets, why India still seems to be leading a hand-to-mouth existence. If the picture is really so rosy, what do things like terrorism, secessionism, communalism, fundamentalism, etc. insinuate at. One, of course, does not deny the threats these problems pose to the Indian polity, but they are not of such a magnitude as to endanger the very survival of the system. Rather than carping about the failure to successfully deal with these problems, it would be worth its while to find out the reasons behind those problems and proffer solutions therefor.

In fact, India hardly existed as a state before 1947 not to speak of its existence as a nation-state. Even though there was always an idea of India, but she did not exist as a reality armed with the trappings of an independent and sovereign state. But an idea of India was always there, so Jawaharlal Nehru did not have to invent an India, he merely discovered it, as the title of his celebrated book, 'The Discovery of India' itself reveals. Against her colonial background that underdeveloped her more than it developed and against her meagre resources and myriad constraints, the fact that India has still managed to survive in one piece for more than five decades, in itself is an achievement.

The problems that look so minatory do so because of this very fact, i.e., India's survival as a democratic state for over half a century. The very functioning of a democratic system quite

naturally unleashed the democratic forces that now seem to have got so out of control as to threaten the very system. But that is something very natural in a democracy.

Yesterday what appeared to be an 'area of darkness', was derided as a land of beggars and snake-charmers, and seemed more like a pack of cards about to collapse any moment, has been able to keep its flock together even though those casting an evil eye on it ended with a black eye and lots of eggs on their face. So, despite her defiance of those at the top of the international pecking order and notwithstanding her attempts to breach the nuclear monopoly, today she is a country which is avidly courted by all and sundry.

India is not only the largest democracy in the world with the second largest populace to her credit, she is the third largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity, has the second largest army, third largest pool of techno-scientific manpower, fourth largest air force, a huge market with 550 million consumers with effective purchasing power, ninth largest industrial power, third largest English-knowing population, has a well-entrenched legal system so crucial to the functioning of a market economy and more importantly, has a conscientious civil society. So, there is nothing to be despondent about. All these developments, howsoever pathological and negative they may appear, are nothing but signs of a maturing democracy trying to come to terms with newer existential realities.

Salient Points

- Negative political and economic developments are nothing but symptomatic of the overall crisis afflicting this country.
- After 1947, many believed that India being diverse and huge, would disintegrate sooner and an iron hand is needed to rule India effectively.
- While talking about India's developmental march from state-nation to nation-state, one should not compare its status with the First World countries.
- Problems like terrorism, communalism, fundamentalism, etc. are not of such a magnitude as to endanger the very survival of the polity of India.
- Still it would be worth to find out the reasons behind those problems and proffer solutions.
- India is the largest democracy, second largest population, third largest economy, third largest pool of techno-scientific manpower, fourth largest air force, a huge market, and so on.

Glossary

Vitriol: something highly caustic or severe in effect, as criticism

Gargantuan: -Enormous

Nostrums: a medicine sold with false or exaggerated claims and with no demonstrable value

Rostrums: any platform, stage, or the like, for public speaking

Odious: deserving or causing hatred

Minatory: menacing; threatening

Derided: to laugh at in scorn or contempt