

Facing the Negative Portents of Nation Building

The perceived crumbling of the Washington Consensus has belied all expectations from the celebrated victory of liberal capitalism. Many feel that the 'invisible hand' of the laissez faire economy has been hiding long enough to notice any sign of a trickle-down effect. The stentorian call for rolling back the state as emerging in the wake of the end of the Cold War in the 1990s has itself been rolled back. Today, the entire world including our national economy is said to be reeling under an economic crisis of sorts and the resultant gloom and doom have started negatively affecting the social arena as well. The recent communal/racial riots in certain parts of the country and the subsequent exodus of people from some very cosmopolitan cities literally threw them out of gear.

The same happened in not so distant past to India's commercial capital Mumbai when some elements raised Cain over emigrants and settlers from North India when these North Indian workers deserted Mumbai for their respective places of domicile. Mumbai and a large part of Maharashtra were truly crippled for quite some time as reflected in closed factories, not to speak of many low-end services, which were also badly affected. The lungiwallahs/ North Indians vs. Marathi debate has raged long enough in Mumbai for the same to get over. After all, the same also shows the weaknesses of our nation building process. We are still to come to terms with India, which our founding fathers including Jawaharlal Nehru discovered through the grind of a long freedom movement.

If we don't strengthen and consolidate the foundations of our nation through the concerted efforts of all, we would be no different from many of the developing countries of the Third World. Many of these countries are still struggling to discover a semblance of sanity and unity in their state building process, not to speak of the nation building. The pride we have taken in the greatness of the civilisational entity called India, shall dissipate in no time if we don't resolve these petty but knotty issues dogging our polity.

If the coming century is going to be the Asian century, we should ensure that India plays a principal role in the same. At a time when we should be training our guns to fight bigger

problems at home and abroad, a negative and sick mindset seems to be in overdrive guiding and directing all the forces of darkness. This definitely shows us in a very poor light as a progressive society, forgetting the lesson Pakistan learnt the wrong way after Bangladesh separated over the issue of discrimination and deprivation of East Pakistan. We should not forget that such a mindset has always hurt the nation building process. We have much bigger problems at hand to resolve than to wrack our brains over such unproductive, meaningless, but debilitating trifles.

However, notwithstanding all-pervading negativities, there was a silver lining in all this, still giving hope. How can anyone forget the out-of-way initiatives and positive emotions shown by Indians including our politicians all across the country in the wake of the exodus of the North-East Indians from some Indian cities? The state governments, responsible leaders from different political parties, NGOs and common citizens went out of way to woo these citizens back to respective cities. And why not? After all, the Constitution of India has given a fundamental right to the citizens all across to work anywhere in the country as enshrined in Article 19 of Part III.

If we break the social contract we all entered into on the 15th of August, 1947, the same may actually portend ill for our beloved country. We would only hurt ourselves if we don't accept and acknowledge the emergent reality of the 'salad bowl' that India has already become. We also have to accept and recognise the fact that a national division of labor has gradually emerged like the international division of labor. We shall only be shooting ourselves in the head if we ever try to interfere with such a process which is actually a part of the larger nation building process.

What is sad is the fact that such intolerant feelings are not confined to India, but have found expressions all over the globe. The examples of Sri Lankan citizens being roughed up and bundled out of Tamil Nadu, the periodic paroxysms of revulsion against Pakistani actors in India, the regular killings of innocent people by religious fundamentalists including Taliban and ISIS, the killing and muffling of liberal voices in Bangladesh, and similar incidents in other parts of the world show the rise of the skinheads and militants.

Analogous expression of parochial sentiments in Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, and other parts of the Middle East are already belying expectations from the Arab Spring. The informed reaction and outpouring over the recent JNU incidents, the 'unwarranted' cartoons and paintings of religious figures, or the arrest of a cartoonist for misrepresentation of the national emblem under 124A of IPC do give an indication of the crooked priorities we have. Without going into the rights and wrongs of these incidents, one can definitely say that we have much better and greater issues to occupy ourselves with than these trifles.

One finds these events shocking and surprising more so at a time when there are many agencies and governments across the world looking for alien life on other planets. While we still have not learnt to organise human life in consonance with our own norms and standards of civilised life, we are desperate about expanding the horizons of our epistemology and ontology beyond this planet. We definitely have no moral right to look for alien life on other planets when we stubbornly refuse to come to terms with the aliens

(read foreigners and people from other castes, communities, regions, religions, etc.) from our own Blue Planet.

At a time when we should be busy resolving our instant problems stemming from a weak economy, problems of illegal cross-border migrations, settling all intractable issues relating to our state-building, problems of chronic poverty and societal in-egalitarianism, unemployment, illiteracy, female foeticide, environmental degradation, looming hydrological and energy crisis and what not, we are preoccupied with completely negative and unproductive issues. The prophets of doom are already working overtime à la Selig Harrison to predict a balkanisation of the Indian nation in no time. We definitely need to rethink our priorities otherwise we shall soon meet a fate that none of us would ever desire.

One just hopes that it all turns out to be a passing phase. We better first resolve the hydra-headed problems like poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment otherwise all our efforts and gains made towards nation-building shall go in vain. As per the findings of the Pew Research Foundation, the confidence of the Indian public in the direction and future economic growth of their country has already declined compared to what it was just a year back. We definitely can do better than what we are doing as a state and as a nation, more so when we aspire to be a great power. However, with small mindset and petty thinking, we can never hope to play a larger than life role on the global stage.

Salient Points

- 'Invisible hand' of the laissez faire economy has no sign of a trickle-down effect.
- North Indians vs. Marathi debate has raged long enough in Mumbai for the same to get over.
- We have bigger problems at hand to resolve than to wrack our brains in such unproductive but debilitating trifles.
- A national division of labour has gradually emerged like the international one.
- Intolerant feelings are not confined to India but all over the globe.
- Confidence of the Indian public in the future economic growth declined.
- We definitely can do better than what we are doing as a nation.

Glossary

Portents:- an indication of something about to happen

Crumbling: to break into small fragments

Stentorian: very loud or powerful in sound

Cain: rent paid in kind

Grind: to reduce to fine particles

Sanity: soundness of judgment

Knotty: difficult

Wrack: destruction

Portend: to extend in duration

Paroxysms: any sudden, violent outburst

Revulsion: distaste/ dislike

Epistemology: a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge

Ontology: the branch of metaphysics that studies the nature of existence or being as such