

QUO VADIS INDIA? (THE GLORY AND GRAND DEVELOPMENT, THE DECLINE AND FALL OF INDIAN DEMOCRACY)

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The history of a free nation begins with its liberation. A flashback highlights the story of the epic struggle enriched by patriotic sacrifices, popular participation, developmental vision, militant acts of bravery, military mobilisation of the Indian National Army and the 'do or die' demand made on the British Empire to quit India. These odyssean adventures marred by zigzags, divisive factors, internal intransigence, communal rivalries, quislingisms and disloyalties, mark the marvel of the birth of our crimson Republic. 'We, the people of India' was a proud assertion against British subjection which solemnly constituted India into a sovereign socialist secular and democratic Republic as a superlative political wonder among the comity of nations.

Rising to the unique glory of the occasion, Nehru intoned in eloquent prose the meaning of this liberalisation:

“Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of midnight hour when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.

The future beckons us. Whither do we go and what shall be our endeavour? To bring freedom and opportunity to the common man, to the peasants and workers of India, to fight and end poverty and ignorance and disease, to build up a prosperous democratic and progressive nation, and to create social, economic and political institutions which will ensure justice and fullness of life to every man and woman.”

Mahatma Gandhi knew how heavy the responsibility of the architects of Free India was and had noted earlier:

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“There is on the face of the earth no other country that has the problem that India has of chronic starvation and slow death - a process of dehumanisation. The solution must, therefore, be original. In trying to find it, we must find the cause of this tremendous tragedy.....It means the levelling down of a few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation’s wealth on the one hand, and the levelling up of the semi starved naked millions on the other. A non violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide divide between the rich and hungry millions persists. The contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor labouring class nearby, cannot last one day in a free India in which the poor will enjoy the same power and the richest in the land. A violent and bloody revolution is a certainty one day, unless there is a voluntary abdication of riches and the power that riches give and sharing them for a common good.”

Dr. Ambedkar addressing the final trend of the Constitution Assembly warned the House thus:

“The third thing we must do is not to be content with mere political democracy. We must make our political democracy a social democracy as well. Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy. What does social democracy mean? It means a way of life, which recognises liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles of liberty, equality and fraternity are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from another is to defeat the very purpose of democracy. On the social plane, we have in India a society based on principles of graded inequality which means elevation of some and degradation of others. On the economic plane, we have a society in which there are some who have immense wealth as against those who live in abject poverty. On the 26th January, 1950 we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one man. In our social and economic life we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value. How long shall we continue this life of contradiction? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible moment or else those who suffer from the inequality, will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up. These downtrodden classes are tired of being governed. They are impatient to govern themselves. This urge for self realisation in the downtrodden classes must not be allowed to devolve into a class struggle or class war. It would lead to a division of the House. That would indeed be a day of disaster.”

This grim message is not time barred. On the contrary, there has been an aggravation of the malady since there has been no serious pursuit of the remedies, social and economic. The prophecy of Baba Saheb is still relevant and the poignancy of the disease is still grave because all that has been done in the semi-centenary period is largely administration of placebos. The Constitution has given great prescriptions but the politicians have been half hearted in importing the reality of the pledges of the Preamble. The performance of the Court has been zigzag, and even the summit Court has been accused by jurists of becoming the confidence keepers of the aristocracy and ignoring the pathetic condition of the proletariat. Truly speaking, Earl Warren's great words have not found actualisation in the Indian context. The great Chief Justice of the United States had said:

“Our judges are not monks or scientists but participants in the living stream of our national life, steering the law between the dangers of rigidity on the one hand and of formlessness on the other. Our system faces no theoretical dilemma but a single continuous problem, how to apply to ever-changing conditions the never changing principles of freedom.”

Alas, our Courts struck down agrarian reforms, allowed nationalisation of banks, permitted the abolition of privy purses and generally gave the impression that the Preamble to the Constitution was more verbal thunder and less part of the Constitution. The Court, however, changed its perspective towards Antodaya and Sarvodaya and began to share the dual values incorporated as the spiritual essence of the Preamble. Nevertheless, Nehru bemoaned that the Supreme Court was trying to be a short Chamber by undoing progressive legislation. Of course, he had held forth before the Constituent Assembly, *“if we cannot solve this problem (deep poverty) soon, all our better constitution will become useless and purposeless.”* It has been fifty years since the coming into effect of the Constitution. The Supreme Court now wonders about the glory and grand vision of our founding fathers. The burning rage during the struggle for freedom notwithstanding, we observe the decline and fall of the secular socialist democratic values of which we were proud. In the 1990s, the situation has become so grim that our swaraj especially in its economic dimension is being bartered away and the founding faith of Swadeshi and self reliance have ceased to be a fighting creed of the people of India. The analysis or rather diagnosis of this pathology is an urgent imperative for statesmen and intellectuals with commitment so that we may turn towards the authentic therapeutics prescribed in the Constitution itself. The goals set out on the 15th of August 1947 have been jettisoned with the result that American corporations are occupying the economic space of the nation. This has resulted in intensifying the despair of the escalating destitutes in the great expanding regions of Bharath.