



Some Light on the Obstacles Faced by the Indian Political System

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SOME LIGHT ON THE OBSTACLES FACED BY THE INDIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM Abstract
More than four decades of experience with a liberal democratic set up is sufficient enough to engage ourselves in sober reflection and introspection about the working of the Indian Political System; its achievements and failures and the challenges confronted by it. This exercise has to be, objective and dispassionate in the sense that one need not be euphoric about its achievements nor despair over its failures.

Abstract

More than four decades of experience with a liberal democratic set up is sufficient enough to engage ourselves in sober reflection and introspection about the working of the Indian Political System; its achievements and failures and the challenges confronted by it. This exercise has to be, objective and dispassionate in the sense that one need not be euphoric about its achievements nor despair over its failures. A balanced approach calls for proper diagnosis of the maladies afflicting the system, recognition of the danger signals and prescribing corrective measures to meet the challenges.

Keywords

Political System, Babri Masjid, Challenges faced by political system, The businessman and Politics Relationship, Remedies to Problems.

One of the remarkable achievements of the Indian Political System, as evidenced from the past 45 yrs. is that it has displayed remarkable resilience in the face of stressful conditions; be it from the external environment (Chinese aggression of 1962; the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 & 1971) from internal conditions (Linguistic riots of 1950s, communal riot of 1964, 1979, Sikh Militancy leading to the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi & the subsequent riot of 1984, the demolition of Babri Masjid in Dec. 92 & the, subsequent communal riot. Bombay blast etc). Among the countries of the 3rd World which gained independence during the Post World War II period, only India had an almost uninterrupted record of functioning as a liberal polity over the past four decades or so, the only aberration being the imposition of national emergency in 1975 by Mrs. Gandhi. As Prof. Weiner remarks what is baffling about India's democratic exceptionalism

is that for the past 40 yrs. the country has been torn by violent social conflicts (which shows) no sign of abating. And yet India's democratic political system continues to function" For him "India is ... like a huge lorry with a dozen or more tyres; a puncture in one or two tyres does not throw the lorry into the ditch India has done well with its political institutions over the past 40 yrs. is cause for some optimism.

This admiration by Prof. Weiner, though encouraging, should not distract us from recognizing the evergrowing challenges to our institutions, systems, way of life and thought confronted today are likely to escalate in future, if proper corrective and timely steps are not taken to meet them. As Kothari says "The challenge facing the Republic in this decade is likely to prove more corrosive than was the case in the last decades of the 80s"). However India is not unique in this respect. All Political systems face challenges and the problem of adjustment in the changing world environment (States of Eastern Europe after the disintegration of the Socialist bloc). What is unique about the Indian case is its immense size (almost of a continental dimension) and diversity with respect to every major indicator like population, religion, caste, community, language etc. Consider for example that 12 of the States in India are bigger in population and territory compared to about 100 sovereign states of the world. U.P. has a population (112 millions) bigger than even Bangladesh (103.2 millions) or Pakistan (100 million) which are the 7th & 8th largest states in the world and Mexico (80-2 millions) and Germany (77.5 million), the most populous states in Western Europe. Four larger cities of India in 1981 Calcutta (9.2 million), Bombay 8.3 million), Delhi (6 million) and Madras (4-4 million) had a population bigger than 96 Sovereign states in the world". There are 15 major languages and nearly 500 dialects spoken by the people. Every major religious system of the world are found in India with the Hindus constituting the majority (82.7%).

These diversities are as big in their physical distribution and dimension as also in their distinctiveness. Moreover we have to keep in mind the contradictions and glaring paradoxes that characterizes India." India is an ancient society and a new nation; a communal society and a secular state; an industrial society with an abiding feudal culture; a democratic polity with pronounced pre-democratic, tribal bases of allegiances; a federal polity with centralized politics and a decolonized state with pronounced colonial mentality". Administering such a country throws up its own challenges which needs to be appreciated.

Major Challenges Faced by Indian Political System

This decline is reflected, first of all in the capacity of the political parties to function in a pluralist democracy like India, parties are built around, in India, on personalities or breakaway groups who hardly differ from the parent organization as far as ideologies and policies are concerned. As a result almost all of them suffer from the crisis of identity. This is also equally true, though to a lesser extent, of ideology based parties who often get fragmented on account of personal ambition, pride, rivalry and prejudice of some leaders. These days one is witness to another distressing phenomenon i.e. lack of broad consensus among parties on national issues which is not a healthy sign. Moreover most of the political parties do not have a strong social base including the Cong. I and the B.J.P. Until the late 60s the Congress had its support base among Muslims, Harijans and some upper caste layers especially Brahmins. This changed radically with the rise of the lower and Middle classes in the North and further altered by the plebiscitary nature of the general elections between 1971 and 1989. However up-to mid 80s it could be said that Congress Party had a social base at least regionally. Today it is not so. The same is the case with the BJP and its flirtation with conservative and fundamentalist forces have made the situation all the more fluid. Thus the party system as a whole has entered a period of deep and prolonged instability. The outcome is disastrous. More and more they are engaged in what is called the politics of opportunism and politics of vote grabbing. Their exclusive stress on palace politics in utter disregard to foundational politics has not only altered the priorities of major parties but also has eroded

the very foundation of electoral democracy in India. Parties are more committed to specific ideology or program of action, rather for all of them rabid populism, mass mobilization of the people on the basis of caste, religion, language and community has become the order of the day. As a result of which completely apolitical and amoral forces have occupied the central stage of India Politics. The cost is very high indeed for the nation. The post- Babri Masjid demolition scene in India is sufficient evidence of the cost that the nation has to pay for the collapse of the party system.

With the decline of the party system, the very existence of which is a sign of political modernization, to mobilize the masses on issues vitally affecting the country and its teeming millions another institution has suffered a decline in power and prestige i.e. the Parliament. A glance at the working of the national legislature reveals that this august body wastes valuable time, energy and resources in getting enmeshed in mundane issues. Almost every session of the Parliament is described predicted as stormy. One witnesses scenes of uproar, frequent walkouts and adjournments in every session. Its members face a crisis of credibility. Cynicism has so pervaded the outlook of the entire nation that the unsubstantiated allegation of a scammer is believed by all whereas the denial by the Chief Executive of the government is not. Like the Parliament, the ruling elite is also suffering from a decline in terms of capacity either to face the challenges or to instill confidence in the masses about their way of governance. This is because to remain in power “The India Political elite cultivate the dualistic style of functioning (which is marked by Public promises and private betrayals. Without promises mass- support in the shape of popular votes is not possible and without betrayal the interest of the dominant classes cannot be served The judiciary too has presented a picture of great ambivalence oscillating between championing the right of the people including minorities and being weak and dilatory in dealing with concerted attack on the same rights. So have the press and the mass media. The combined impact of these actors has rendered the normal instability of politics increasingly confrontationist and explosive to say the least.

This brings another fact of the India Political life

The unholy nexus between crooked businessmen crooked politicians and the resultant rampant corruption. Corruption is a universal phenomenon to be witnessed in all countries developed as well as developing. What is shocking is that in India there is a resigned, almost fatalistic acceptance of it and any well- meaning suggestion to check it is dismissed as utopian thinking. It is because of this corruption that the crooked businessmen, Mafias, landlords with their private armies have been able to control the politicians and indirectly have a vice like grip over our political life. What is needed is to mobilize public opinion for serious political and electoral reforms because at stake is not only the survival but the future of the very institution and foundation of our political system. It needs a churning up of Society and a comprehensive re-composition of politics. What is distressing is that no political party or leadership is strong enough to take the process restructuring Indian Politics and reviving the party system. These declines have further eroded the capability of the political system with the spectrum of violence which is haunting it for quite sometime. Though the country was born in bloodshed yet the phenomenon of violence has become quite endemic with the passage of time. Today one is a witness not only to communal violence whose frequency is increasing but also violence by terrorist gangs, political violence, violence by interest groups and professional unions and violence by individual and groups. These are all outcomes of criminalization of our political life and the blame can be squarely laid on political parties and the politicians.

The frequent outbreak of violence with varying degree of intensity leads to complete paralysis of normal law and order situation in many parts of the country (witness for example the aftermath of Babri Masjid demolition) leading to frequent deployment of army for maintenance of law and order. This has two repercussions. One is the erosion of trust and confidence on government by the public

leading to cynicism, alienation and even a sense of despair. Secondly the frequent diversion of army from its chief task of defending the country, It is to the credit of the Indian army that it is depoliticized and has so far behaved in a most commendable and restrained way while discharging the duty of restoring normalcy. It is a dangerous practice in the sense that the army is trained for war and by frequently deploying it on civil duties its normal training and war prepared- ness is disrupted. Moreover their involvement in civil duties will definitely make them partisan at some point of time (particularly while controlling communal riots in different parts of the country). This over reliance on army must be reduced. The ruling elites cannot just go on asking the military to step in to hide their abject failure in their primary responsibility all the time.

The above assessment, though not comprehensive, no doubt presents a grim picture of the Indian Political system in its operational aspects. The maladies afflicting its functioning are assuming dangerous, proportion. It also calls for drastic steps by the rulers and supported by the people. We can just outline a few steps.

Steps to Rectify Political Disbalance

First of all what is required at the structural level is a recasting of our present federal system with the emphasis on creation of as many states as possible on the criteria of socio-economic homogeneity and felt group identity. This would not only lessen Social tension in a more or less homogeneous area but also create a more favorable climate for change. Moreover “When the U.S.A., with a third of India’s population can have 50 States, then India can also recast its federation to have as many States as required by the genuine needs of its diverse population”.

Secondly, a recasting of the Centre-State relations is urgently required, so that the genuine, aspiration of the units of India federation can be satisfied.

Thirdly activation of the local institutions of governance in the rural and urban areas is of utmost importance. It will provide the necessary input into the process of stabilizing the foundations of India’s grassroot democracy.

Fourth, a complete overhauling of the present electoral system has become over- due. A national debate on this should be organized and the views should be translated into concrete terms, and policies. Over and above what is required is a sense of dedication and commitment on the part of “we the people of India” to the ideals of the constitution which will go a long way in restoring our democratic system.

All this calls for statesmanship of the highest order. The tragedy of India is that whereas we have uncounted leaders but hardly any statesman of stature & foresight. The challenge before us is not to win a battle but the war.

Conclusion

This paper is a reflection on some of the major challenges that is being faced by the India Political system. More specifically it is concerned with the erosion of the party system in India and the ever-increasing upsurge of violence (communal, caste, terrorist, individual and political) that engulfs our political system with alarming frequency. It is our belief that there is a consistent decline over these years. In terms of capacity, of major political institutions and the ruling elites to deal with the multifarious crisis in India which is generating considerable stress on the capacity of the system to sustain itself.

Therefore the above mentioned measures and remedial strategies must be applied in an organized manner to overcome this unfortunate outcome of Indian Political System.

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