

Democracy Unites

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Barack Obama, who is in the race for being nominated as presidential candidate for America, made a remarkable speech on race relations in America. It was not merely complaining about discrimination against blacks (African-Americans) but it was about extending hand of friendship towards whites so that people of America could stand together and form a more perfect union.

In fact he began by referring to the opening sentence of the constitution of America "We the people, in order to form a more perfect union". The Indian constitution also opens with "we the people of India". Obama was seeking reconciliation as a statesman and a country looks to such leaders who have grace, a future vision and seek to unite and refrain from dividing.

Those who seek to divide for the sake of power will ultimately be thrown on the dustbin of history. They may come to power momentarily but will never rule the hearts of people, would never command any respect. Hitler though most powerful in his country, was hated in his own lifetime and in his own country it is crime to take his name.

A true democrat always tries to include everyone in power and fruits of development. Democracy unites everyone through inclusion as exclusion of any section of the population would prove to be divisive. The constitution of India reserves jobs and parliamentary seats for the Scheduled castes and tribes precisely for this reason so that they are also included.

The African-Americans were excluded from power structure in America for long. They were brought as slaves and treated as slaves even long after slavery was abolished. It needed leaders like Martin Luther King to campaign for their inclusion in early sixties. He also did not adopt the way of conflict but of nonviolence and reconciliation. He adopted Gandhian way and infused confidence in African-Americans in USA and gave them sense of pride and equal partners in American system. White racialists tried to exclude them, hated them and deprived them of their due rights.

White racists lost and blacks won and policy of positive discrimination was adopted by America in order to do justice to African-Americans. Barack Obama addressing the people of America thus said, "What would be needed were Americans in successive generations who were willing to do their part-through protests and struggle, on the streets and in the courts, through a civil war and civil disobedience and always at great risk-to narrow that gap between the promise of our ideals and reality."

He also said, in the same speech, "Despite the temptation to view my candidacy through a purely racial lens, we won commanding victories in states with some of the whitest populations in the country. In South Carolina, where the Confederate Flag still flies, we built a powerful coalition of African-Americans and white Americans." It is a great moment for America that it has risen above its white racialism, though after a great struggle. It is moment of glory indeed, perhaps the moment when one can say slavery has indeed been abolished, not only from the constitution but also from the hearts and minds of the people.

Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru also rose above all communal prejudices and struggled to make India secular. But like America it is taking long time to become truly secular. America abolished slavery from its constitution long ago but it took more than a century to abolish it from hearts and minds of people. India abolished communalism from the constitution and all forms of discrimination in 1950 itself while proclaiming the constitution but both caste and communalism is still well entrenched in hearts and minds.

Politicians further keep on dividing people to satiate their lust for power. After Gandhi and Nehru and Maulana Azad India has failed to produce any statespersons. On the eve of partition when communal bloodbath was taking place it was this trinity of Gandhi, Nehru and Azad who again enthused sense of unity and confidence, especially among the people of India. Maulana Azad with his great speech delivered from the steps of Jama Masjid to build the confidence among the completely shaken and shattered.

However, the coming generations of leaders could not build upon this, though Indian constitution did imbibe these ideals. The gap between ideals and the real has increased over the years, thanks to petty political interests. Mahatma Gandhi and others launched civil disobedience movement to break the colonial stranglehold. Now, like King Martin Luther Jr Indian people have to launch a civil rights movement to make this biggest democracy truly inclusive changing hearts and minds.

True test of democracy would be when any deserving citizen of India, be he/she tribal, dalit, Muslim, Christian, Parsi or Sikh can become prime minister of India. It is true a Muslim, dalit and Sikh have risen to the office of President and a Sikh is now Prime Minister but President's post is decorative.

Yes, theoretically a Muslim, Christian or dalit can become Prime Minister too but that ideal has not yet been realised. India is the largest democracy in the world but Indian hearts and minds are yet to capture true democratic spirit. It is undoubtedly a great revolution that has given right to vote to lowest of low and poorest of poor but the society is far from being equal in spirit.

It is heartening that an African-American, until yesterday being looked down upon, has risen to this height, he is competing and so far nearly winning the candidacy for President-ship of most powerful nation of the world. And whites are voting enthusiastically for Obama. No one thought until yesterday that an African-American, can ever achieve this. Racialism in America, though not dying, is undoubtedly diminishing.

However, in India, let alone dying, communalism and casteism, is increasing. Communal parties and outfits are promoting rank communalism for the sake of majority votes. Even secular parties have no serious tryst with destiny.

Communalism and casteism are penetrating deeper into the political processes. Dalits and minorities are living in fear as riots break out on petty quarrels. Christians had not faced such situation after independence right up to nineties which they are facing today. In Orissa Christians witnessed communal frenzy on the eve of Christmas. And now BJP ruled states after states are passing laws against conversion ironically calling them 'Freedom of Religion Act'. Even a Congress ruled state (Himachal Pradesh) passed such a law. So much for its commitment to secularism.

Today Communal parties are on the offensive and secular parties (with the exception of communist parties) are not only mute witness but also ally with them. Janata Dal (Secular?) which had broken from Janta Dal (United) on the question of allying with the BJP, itself allied with BJP in Karnataka to come to power. Without including minorities in the political processes and making them equal partners, India cannot become true democracy.

BJP is, on the other hand, making all possible efforts to exclude religious minorities and making only symbolic gesture towards Scheduled Castes and tribes. The moment Congress makes some symbolic gesture towards Muslims like BJP makes towards SCs, it raises bogey or appeasement and Gandhians lose their nerves. Today a large section of bureaucracy and the police also has been communalised and police does not hesitate to openly play partisan role in communal riots against Muslims and Christians.

BJP, during NDA rule communalised vital organs of Indian state though it failed to revise Indian Constitution to remove article 25 to 30 guaranteeing rights to minorities. Mr L K Advani, then Deputy Prime Minister and now aspiring to be Prime Minister, if NDA comes to power again, openly praised Narendra Modi after Gujarat riots though the whole world was condemning what happened in Gujarat and holding Modi to be responsible for genocide in Gujarat.

India's glorious past and its composite culture (right from beginning of its history) can make all proud and India will be able to play that role again only when its leaders resist the lust for power and dedicate themselves to its moral and spiritual values. All communities, including religious minorities, have contributed richly to India's glory. India is, and has always been, an alliance of religions and cultures and never a monolith which communal forces want it to be.

BJP can also contribute to future of India provided it gives up its anti-minority obsession and adopts open door policy. Though BJP claims to stand for 'justice for all and discrimination against none', it is nothing more than a hollow at best and deceptive at worst, slogan. One wishes it adopts this slogan with true heart and it will indeed contribute to India's future. □□□