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Man of the Millennium Mahatma Gandhi

Social Education

The problem of social education or education for the people is even more difficult than that of children's education. For the latter, we have examples of how it has been carried out. But for the education of our masses, we may say that not even that much guidance is available to us. In this respect, we can learn only a little even from foreign countries. Conditions in India are also different from those in other countries.

At present, our ideas of religion and our ways of living it have grown very weak. Besides, there are frequent strifes as a result of the multiplicity of religions in our land. There cannot be the same type of education for all—Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians etc. For example, we cannot put forward the same arguments in regard to cow-protection to the Muslims as we can to the Hindus.

And yet we have to educate both about the evils of strife between the Hindus and Muslims. Social reform work is a huge and very difficult

task. Each community has its own peculiar characteristics; each suffers from the existence of sub-castes. Let no one think that there are no sub-castes among Muslims or Christians.

The Hindus have infected all communities with this evil. Health, hygiene and politics are the only subjects which can be imparted to all alike. I include knowledge of economics in politics. Here in India, politics and the science of health are closely related to religion, strange as this may seem. For instance, not all those belonging to different religions look on politics in the same manner. Then, too, consideration of religious sentiments becomes inevitable in deciding about the treatment of diseases.

Those who are engaged in the task of imparting education to the people cannot advise beef tea to all for recuperation after illness. Nor can they convince Muslims of the advisability of following the rules of hygiene in the matter of drinking water.

CONSTITUTION REVIEW Party System & Electoral Reform - II

R. Venkataraman

A mature electorate is the only guarantee
for a real democracy.

Election Expenses

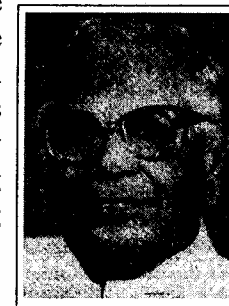
It is notorious that the ceilings on election expenditure fixed by law to the state and central legislatures are more honoured in breach than in observance. Today election expenses for a parliamentary constituency soar above a crore of rupees and the state assembly half that amount. This is clearly a nefarious method of depriving an honest and desirable candidate from entering the legislature. With an economy which is financed predominantly by money circulating outside the banking system (black money) the statutory controls

over ceilings on election expenditure have become a mockery.

Lavish expenditure on cut outs, decorations, attractive posters, processions, with music and drum, entertainments like dance or other shows preceding or following election meetings, supply of eatables and drinks directly or indirectly through friends and relatives, bribery of

voters with money or things in kind are but a few of the items of extravagant election expenditure.

In a parliamentary democracy the electorate has to choose a party whose policy



and programme it approves. Therefore any expenditure by a candidate on anything other than propaganda for its policies and programmes may be declared corrupt practice and election of candidates who engages in any thing else except those permitted activities shall be set aside.

The valid expenditure for an election shall be the following only:

1. Holding meetings;
2. Printing manifestoes or brochures;
3. Meeting people collectively or individually;
4. Employing volunteers and workers for distribution of literature, voting slips containing the name, number, and the polling booth etc.

I made this suggestion as early as 1975 in the Swarajya (Weekly). If this condition is strictly enforced the astronomical expenditure on elections can be cut down drastically and honest candidates may have a chance. Seeking votes with false promises or free food, free clothing etc. or by

fabulous advertisements, music, dance and shows really amounts to cheating the electorate and stealing their precious rights.

At present the expenditure by a political party is not included in the total election expenditure of the candidates. The Supreme Court in the case of Gupta Vs Chawla held that the expenses incurred by the political party in favour of candidates should be treated as expenses authorised by the candidate and be subject to the ceiling laws.

The decision sought to ensure that candidates and parties are placed on an equal footing and also sought to prevent big money having an advantage in elections. But the Parliament amended the Representation of People Act and excluded expenditure of political parties from the expenditure ceiling of the candidates.

In order to ensure a measure of equity among contesting candidates and also prevent extravagant expenditure on elections, the said amendment to Representation of Peoples Act needs to be repealed.

Company Law shall regulate corporate funding of political parties. Such funding shall be separately approved by the shareholders at the annual general meeting. Besides no funds shall be provided to any political party which has been derecognized by the Election Commissioner.

State Funding of Candidates

For a long time there has been a clamour for state funding of elections and several committees have gone into it. That a poor and deserving candidate should be enabled to win a seat is undoubtedly a laudable objective. But the ground reality in our country is that such funding will only serve to augment the resources of the affluent candidates. The benefit to deserving candidates will not commensurate with heavy burden on the exchequer. Providing assistance like free postal facility or providing accessories like paper for poster or for voting slips etc. are too small to make a dent on the

colossal election expenditure and will serve no purpose. Only it will add to administrative costs and to the already proliferating functions of the government.

Criminalisation of Politics

With a view to preventing criminals and bad characters from entering the legislatures, the Law Commission had recommended that those against whom charges have been framed may be debarred from contesting. Instead, statutory provision may be made for filing an affidavit along with the nomination disclosing earlier convictions and the current cases in which charges have been framed so that the voters know the antecedents of the candidates.

It may be made obligatory for every candidate to disclose his and his dependants' assets and liabilities in the affidavit mentioned earlier. These statements may help in proving possession of assets disproportionate to their known sources of income. Many candidates may avoid contesting,

as it would involve disclosure of his past and present misconduct.

In order to prevent mushroom parties and frivolous candidates, the Law Commission has advised banning of candidates altogether. I am afraid the remedy is worse than the disease. Besides it is a contravention of the fundamental rights of a citizen, unless otherwise disqualified, to stand for election to the legislature. On the other hand, I would suggest that the minimum votes that a candidate should poll to save his deposit should be raised to 20% of the votes polled and that a candidate who forfeits his deposit shall be debarred from standing for election to any statutory body from the Panchayat to the President of India for a period of 6 years.

Muscle Power

Another matter of grave concern to a healthy democracy is the use of muscle power to distort the elections. Booth capturing, ballot box seizing, intimidation of voters,

prevention of voters going to polling booth etc. should not be treated as ordinary offences but as offences against society and stringent penalties should be imposed on such offenders. Preventive arrest of such elements should be liberally resorted to prevent such abuse and close watch should be kept on such elements right from the start of the election process and not merely on the polling day.

Defection

Defection from a party is an affront to the electorate that had returned him. Whether one member or one-third of the members deserts the party it is defection. Defection law shall, therefore, be amended to make defection from the party punishable with deprivation of the membership of the House. It should be further provided that a person who has been found guilty of defection shall not be eligible for admission to any political party including the original party to which he belonged. Similarly action shall

be taken for other acts like refusal to abide by the whip and the directions of the party.

Voting Method

In order to facilitate the polling, electronic voting system and the issue of multi purpose identity cards may be expedited. The present use of ballot papers is costly and cumbersome.



Mature Electorate Needed

Finally a mature electorate is the only guarantee for a real democracy. If voters will shun the criminal, the corrupt, the political grasshopper, or will not be deceived by false promises of free food, clothing, free electricity and so on, but realize that they are electing a government for themselves and not exercising a patronage in favour of their kith and kin, their neighbour or members of their caste or religious fraternity, many

of the suggestions contained in this paper would be totally unnecessary. We have not taught in our schools, the responsibilities of the citizen to the state nor promoted the concept of the Indian nation. We have gloriously boasted about our unity in diversity which is our wishful thinking. We are Bengalis, Gujaratis, Kashmiris and Keralites. Alternatively we are Hindus, Muslims or Christians. But we do not feel that we are all Indians.

When the American Constitution was framed there was no American Nation. There were settlers from all parts of the globe. But they wedded themselves into a nation. There must be a national endeavour to build an Indian Nation based on equality and fraternity.

(Concluded)

SWEET THOUGHT		 NOT BY PROGENY, NOT BY WEALTH, BUT BY RENUNCIATION ALONE IMMORTALITY IS REACHED
		
PONDY BAZAAR ADAYAR ANNA NAGAR PH: 4312345		<i>- Upanishad</i> 