

OPEN PAGE

## Votaries of democracy, beware of those propagandist tricks



**Swami Agnivesh**

OCTOBER 15, 2017 00:00 IST

UPDATED: OCTOBER 14, 2017 18:37 IST

**The daily belabouring of issues only creates a frenetic public parade of issues and allegations. But nothing is followed up to establish the truth**

**P**olitics must be bridled by spiritual principles. In a democratic polity, those who are spiritual have to be political in the true sense of the term. It suits the interests of the corrupt and oppressive players in politics to sustain the myth that politics is a den of scoundrels. Politics is sacred. A Swachh Bharat will be possible only through swachh politics.

Commitment to truth is the core that spirituality and politics should share. Truth operates on the ground as justice. Justice addresses human dignity and welfare. Wherever truth is compromised, people's welfare has suffered and oppression has bared its fangs.

It is politics that contextualises commitment to truth and makes it concrete. Those who care for truth in politics remain continually vigilant against every measure, every propagandist trick, meant to hypnotise the masses. Commitment to truth, if genuine, creates a national culture marked by scientific temper and rational thinking.

### **The right to question**

Consider the following argument. The people have voted for us. Therefore, you have no right to criticise or question whatever we do by way of **governance**.

This could seem reasonable. But what is the truth? The argument chooses to be blind to the fact that the capacity of the masses to think rationally can be disabled by a variety of factors such as lack of education, their inability to think rationally, their vulnerability to propaganda, the non-availability of relevant data, the creation of hype and waves, and so on. Democracy, especially, is under a duty to educate and empower citizens to think rationally and choose objectively. Oppressive regimes are averse to spreading education and free thinking.

Or, consider the dogmas of patriotism and nationalism. Surely, both are valuable to the extent of serving as catalytic agents to galvanise people's energy for nation-building. But that is not how these concepts have been used in history. They have served, mostly, to spread hatred among nations and, within them, between castes, groups, communities.

Commitment to truth on the part of citizens requires that they see through the motive in overwhelming public consciousness with an avalanche of issues. An illusion of upholding accountability is created by the daily belabouring of issues. A new issue is ushered in sensationally even before the current one settles down. So we have a frenetic public parade of issues and allegations. Nothing is followed up to the extent of establishing the truth of issues. Nothing changes.

### **Mutual harmony**

It is basic to a democracy that its citizens remain in harmony with one another. At the very least, they should not treat each other as enemies. Enmity is spread only by vested interests that hope to thrive by polarising citizens. The incompatibility between professed love for the country and infecting the people with hatred remains ignored. There is no instance in history of the policy of 'divide and rule' promoting people's welfare.

The true patriot, wrote Aristotle two millennia ago, in a democracy ought to take care that the majority are not too poor. With extraordinary foresight, he prescribed that the fruits of development should be distributed preferentially among the poor. He does so to ensure that the oligarchic element, which lurks in every democratic polity, does not become powerful enough to scuttle democracy. The corporates of today are the successors of yesteryear oligarchs. The threat that the oligarchic elements hold out to democracy becomes ominous when the media – the chief arbiter of public opinion – play a partisan and propagandist role. When this process crosses the *Lakshman rekha*, it imperils democracy.

Finally, the dogma of stability and its implications for the dynamic of democracy needs to be watched. Every centre of power is apt to deem itself to be the sole and legitimate custodian of national destiny. It views prospects for change with extreme intolerance. This keeps the dividing line between 'freedom of choice' and 'sedition' continually fluid. Attempts and advocacies aimed at influencing citizens' right to choose, purporting to bring about a regime change, are mistaken for sedition. This brings 'the right to choose' under extreme stress and strain.

This accounts for the difference between a corrupt government and a tyrannical one. The former knows itself to be a bird of passage. Its managers are, therefore, fixated on reaping a bumper harvest in quick time. A tyrannical government is obsessed not with megabucks but with self-perpetuation. It substitutes the money with monopoly. The corrupt do not wish to be caught. The tyrannical do not wish to be shown the door. Both addictions harm democracy. And both skip on thin ice.

agnivesh70@gmail.com

Printable version | Oct 15, 2017 7:40:47 PM | <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/open-page/votaries-of-democracy-beware-of-those-propagandist-tricks/article19861827.ece>

© The Hindu