

# Ethics in Politics

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*It has been suggested that citizens ought to take the initiative to change the system. But ordinary citizens have no organization or funds. The only segment which can bring about change in the political system is the corporate sector. Educational institutions and the Media can help to bring about change by creating awareness and sustaining funding social, economical and political changes.*

Ethics is a comprehensive term which encompasses moral, humanistic and philosophical values. Prosperity and peace of a nation depend on the ethical attitude and behavior of all the entities in various fields and sectors, amongst which the most important is Politics, which consists of politicians, parties, political system and the bureaucracy included, which implements policies and decisions. India has elected a new Lok Sabha. Citizens are aghast at the unethical practices followed in the election campaigns and processes. The outer face of democracy has been exposed as monarchy, mafia, liquor, money, criminality, fraud, pettiness and violence in words and action. Such indecent and ugly behavior is against

the ethos of a country with a tradition of 5000 year-old profound culture.

People in all walks of life are committed to democracy, the bedrock of free society. But they are disillusioned and disgusted with our model of democracy, which has degenerated into mockery since independence. Voters have expressed their resentment against the candidates and their behavior by not turning out for voting, in spite of campaigns appealing to citizens' conscience. Sensitive and patriotic citizens feel helpless. Political commentators have expressed their concern about the unity of our young nation and stability of the political system. Some e-Media and press have a merry time, portraying politicians as, bluffers, boasters, boors and bandits, which increase circulation and viewers. Some are doing an excellent job of reporting and arranging debates.

It is not as if Indians are intrinsically ignorant and immature to observe

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democratic ideals. Many leaders are basically well meaning and good people. But the system compels good leaders and their parties to behave in unruly and unethical ways of talking and acting. The monolithic Congress Party has split into hundred parts, led by regional chieftains, whose loyalty is to the region, language or caste base their only vote bank.

The root cause of this malady and tragedy is the political-economy model (PEM), which is theoretically unsound and practically unsuitable for our situation. It is impossible to operate it without resorting to immoral and illegal practices, as followed by many leaders during the last two months of campaigns. Unfortunately, there is very little discussion about changing the system. Vote bank politics, pampering the electorate with false promises, appealing to caste and linguistic sentiments etc are inevitable. Under the PEM, leaders, who are ill equipped for the task, are directly interfering and participating in development as entrepreneur, manager, banker, insurer, player, arbitrator, sports person, manager, and controller and in hundred other roles. For everything, government permission is required, and hence MLAs and MPs enjoy enormous power with which they can mint money in crores and favour their followers.

We can see crowds in the bungalows of Ministers, where one thousand wait in the lawn, hundred in the drawing room, ten in the bed room and two in the bath room - all trying to get a minute of their leaders to seek favours in return for the votes and money they have given to the candidate and party. Most of our MPs and MLAs are not serving

the country, but are using the system for themselves and their kith and kin, cronies and castes. They are in a business, where quick money can be made by misusing the system. The present bureaucratic system is a silent spectator or a partner at times where facts can be hidden and illegal transactions and approvals can be smuggled, maintaining the record clean. That is why leaders want their favourite and pliable babus adept in file noting. There is a nexus and network of Netha-Babu-Businessman, which makes it possible to manipulate the government apparatus and divert funds for their selfish ends. Leaders who get elected by foul and fraudulent means are not competent to be CEOs of development ministries and projects in a country like ours.

While idealists joined the freedom movement, subsequent MPs and MLAs are just figure heads, What with 30% criminals! Many attend only for a few days in a year and 70 percent have not opened their mouths in the Parliament. They spend Rs 5 to 15 crores to get elected. Hence they believe in ROI principle and garner sufficient surplus for future elections. In spite of allocating thousands of crores of rupees for the BPL, in past ten or so 5 year plans, 30% of Indians are still poor and illiterate, since funds are siphoned off by the corrupt system. Competent persons with character and commitment can get into the political arena, if the system is changed.

Major reason for this malaise is that independent India deviated from our ancient thought and wisdom. Now Dharma and Duty have had no place in the Constitution. Rights are emphasized with least emphasis on

duties. There is no mention of our cultural and spiritual ethos. Linguistic states were formed to appease regional electorates. Language is the most powerful divider of people.

The Indian civilization was a single cultural entity for 10,000 years, which is still living and vibrant; while 48 others have disappeared leaving no trace of their ancient glory. One major causative factor for this achievement is the importance given to Ethics and morals by the rulers in ancient times. In fact, the real name of Hinduism is Sanathana Dharma, which means Eternal Values. Ethics essentially means Dharma. Purushartha devolves around Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. But our 'netas' in all their fields follow the middle two ignoring Dharma and Moksha. In mythology and ancient history, our rulers observed Dharma. Janaka was considered to be 'rajarishi' - half ruler and half sage, upholding Dharma. In mythology, our kings were scholars, who sacrificed everything for peace on earth. Welfare and service of the people were their motto. The world can be divided into "those who have, and others who do not have". India has thousands in a third category. "Those who have, but do not want". Buddha had a kingdom, which he abandoned to find solution to man's misery. Compare those hundreds with the present lot who are pursuing power and money like carnivorous animals chasing prey.

India observed Raja Neethi for millennia. India's concept of Ethics, Values and Philosophy are being propagated all over the world. None of these are reflected in our

Constitution, governance, education and establishment.

In fact, the one meaning of Ethics is Culture, which is "Concern for others". The substance of the 90,000 slokas of Bhagavatham is "Helping others is meritorious, and hurting others is sin", which is the essence of Ethics. The Ten Commandments of Moses, Sermon on the Mount by Jesus, Eight codes of Conduct of Buddha and the Pathanjali Yoga Suthras - all speak the same Ethics. But under a wrong interpretation of Secularism, these are not taught in schools nor emphasized in the establishment. Holidays are given for religious days. Instead of imparting the teachings of these spiritual leaders, the days are utilized for the most frivolous pursuits which satisfy sensuous pleasures. This shows how much the PEM is alien to our culture.

The most popular Ithihasas - Ramayana and Mahabharata - illustrate Dharma. Vasishta's Upadesa to Sri Rama, Bhishma's advice to Dharmaputhra and Vidura Nithi are discourses on Raja Dharma. Even the God of Death is known as Dharma Raja. Such a great fall from the ideals of Ethics and Dharma is entirely due to the inappropriate political economy model adopted by independent India and by deviating from Bharathiya ideals, on the ground that we are secular, and would not touch Hinduism. Vyasa moaned "Dharma would fulfill Artha and Kama. But still nobody is observing Dharma."

In no other sector of economic and social life, is there so much of unethical behavior as in Politics, which would be imitated and followed by people. People are losing faith in democracy and also respect for leaders,

which would then lead to collapse of the system and possibly chaos.

During the freedom movement, our leaders were adored and even worshipped, as they were engaged in a noble task, goal, the struggle for independence without caring for their personal gain. Now there is no ideal or noble mission. Instead, the motive is largely self aggrandizement and naked pursuit of power and privilege. A few leaders are still selfless and not corrupt. But they are helpless to stop the decline of values. The main reason is that the system is not appropriate and secondly we have deviated from Dharma in public life.

It can be easily proved that such an unfortunate state of affairs in the political arena is not due to any inherent bad tendencies of people and their leaders, who are by and large good. But this malaise is entirely due to the wrong PEM and bureaucratic systems as well as unethical values of deviant individuals who man the establishment.

A combination of systems, culture, values, environment, and personal leadership are needed for ethical behavior of politicians and for good governance. Gandhiji wanted Congress leaders to observe simple rules of conduct so that people would emulate them. But most of our leaders do not do so. Most government servants are arrogant and indifferent. Personal lives of many of our leaders are ostentatious as they live in palatial bungalows and are busy in meetings and flying from one place to other always surrounded by gun trotting NSGs. We can see our top rulers only on TV Screens or in papers. What a pity. Gandhi & Nehru lived

and died as a part of the people and never shunned them.

The political system does not attract good people. The reason is obvious. Elections cost Rs 5 to 15 crores, which good people cannot afford. Why is it so expensive? One can mint money by becoming an MLA or MP. The government is a businessman and has the authority to approve economic and social enterprises. And hence the wrong kind enters politics. Government's main function is governance, which is neglected. Ministers demand plump portfolios where they can make money and wield power. These features have to be changed. There is some improvement after 1992 when liberalization was started. But India has to go a long way by way of reforms, one of which is to reduce the power of the Government over the people in many sectors and fields, where the PPP model has proved to be more prudent and result oriented.

It has been suggested that citizens ought to take the initiative to change the system. But ordinary citizens have no organization or funds. The only segment which can bring about change in the political system is the corporate sector. Educational institutions and the Media can help to bring about change by creating awareness and sustaining funding social, economical and political changes.

From the management point of view, India is too big and complex to be ruled by the present system. The ten large states should be split into 30 smaller units, which would make it easy to govern and manage. States then cannot confront the Centre. The six Metro cities should be converted to City States. Parties should be voted to power and

not individuals. Proportionate representation should be introduced, instead of simple majority. Government should be strengthened for governance. The Bureaucracy should be made managerial, and rules and procedures should be simplified. HRD programmes on Ethics should be conducted in a massive scale for politicians, administrators and for future generation through schools and universities.

Spirituality is an additional route to bring Ethics in Politics. But that is not feasible in the present interpretation of secularism, which bans religion and ideals from the Establishment. Bhagawad Gita has been introduced in many US schools. Sanskrit is taught in US, Germany and other countries. The one million pages of Ethics in theory, practice and story form, available in our scriptures, should not be taboo in India on the basis of misinterpreted secularism.

Ethics in politics and good governance are well brought out in India's heritage literature and are increasingly understood and practiced by other nations. But in Indian

politics and administration, it has taken a back seat and we are inhibited to refer and use these due to our misinterpreted secularism. We have done injustice to mother India and to ourselves by such denial. Bharath Matha would wait patiently like mother who is prepared to suffer in silence till her children show respect to her and her teachings and reduce her anguish. But we must awake, arise and introduce reforms in politics and administration, discard the present PEM, rewrite our constitution with emphasis on 'Dharma' - duties and responsibilities, where money and caste, politics, linguistic regionalism etc, have no room. Ethics in Indian politics is possible only through a revolutionary reform. For this, the young and committed should not view politics as a dirty business to meet selfish interests of power and money, but an opportunity to serve the country, create wealth and welfare and enter politics and administration to lead this second freedom struggle, to make India a true democracy where all are equally and fairly treated irrespective of religion, caste and language.

“People in power should always remember that they have authority to perform duty and not an opportunity to abuse power.”

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