World Conference on Recreating South Asia: Democracy, Social Justice and Sustainable Development

IIC, New Delhi, 24-26 February 2011

State of Democracy in India

Dr. Subhash C. Kashyap

February, 2011
STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Subhash C. Kashyap

Contents

Abstract
Introduction
Concept of Democracy
Criteria for Measuring State of Democracy
Contextualising Democracy in Constitutional Terms
Achievements and Failures
The Road Ahead
Select References
Abstract

The nation is passing through critical times. Our democracy is under severe strain. Faith of the people in the quality, integrity and efficiency of those in government stands seriously eroded. But, with all its shortcomings, democracy remains our but bet and USP.

The twentieth century closed with what was considered a world-wide triumph for ‘liberal’ democracy. But, the first decade of the twenty-first century has thrown up a whole series of serious new challenges. The criteria and yardsticks for measuring the success of democracy have to be different and largely country-specific. Western yardsticks cannot be entirely relevant or valid for determining the state or efficacy of democracy in non-western societies. In every country, democratic institutions have to arise from its own soil, to suit its environs and societal needs. Mere outward trappings of a liberal framework of democratic institutions, a charter of human rights and periodical elections may mean little unless they lead to real participatory role of ordinary citizens in decision making, clean and people-friendly governance and all inclusive growth.

While there are multiple linkages between democracy and development, to measure them in quantitative terms is difficult. Also, development should not be measured merely in economic GDP terms. What is more important is effective human development, fulfilment of basic civic and social rights and general improvement in the quality of life for all.

Indian democracy had its own distinctive character. For our founding fathers, the highest objectives were those of removing poverty, illiteracy and backwardness and building a united nation. We opted for a representative parliamentary democracy as the most suited for our highly pluralist society with many diverse pulls. The emphasis was on individual freedom, rule of law, economic democracy, social justice and equality of status and opportunity for all.

India can take legitimate pride in having maintained the unity and integrity of the nation and remained a vibrant functioning democracy. For over 60 years, the judiciary has remained independent, the press free and civil authority supreme. There are several achievements. The Right to Information and the Right to Education laws and the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have been revolutionary in nature. But, of late, there has been a general deinstitutionalisation of institutions and devaluation of democratic values. The Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary and even the fourth estate – the media – have suffered an image deficit. That there has been a steep fall in the standards of conduct in public life and administration is widely accepted. That there is a crisis of character and principles in politics and public administration, is saying the obvious.

Growth of a certain cynicism towards normal democratic processes and an erosion of respect for political parties, politicians, legislators and civil servants, present a disturbing scenario. Nothing can conceal the truth that our democratic processes are still largely dependent on caste and communal vote banks and criminals and are run with colossal amounts of black money generated through crime and corruption and that the parties and leaders who present
before the people opposite agenda and fight the polls against each other often commit a fraud on the electorate by coming together after the polls to share the fruits of power.

The degradation of democratic processes has reached such low levels that fighting elections has become impossible without several crores of rupees and private armies or goonda gangs. In big cities, slums are big business for the politicians/criminals.

Unfortunately, despite 63 years of freedom, the ordinary Indian – the much touted *aam admi* – has yet to feel the glow of the dawn of freedom or the transfer of power to his hands. The colonial model of administration and the colonial mind set have continued with the people being still treated as subjects and not as citizens of a sovereign, democratic republic.

To save democracy, ways and means have to be found for reasserting the will of the people over the organs and functionaries of the State and restoring power to the citizen where it belongs. Perhaps democracy as we know it is not enough. We have to revisit, reinvent and revitalize it to serve the common man. The task is stupendous and calls for a concerted effort to awaken and motivate the people to discharge their responsibilities, be vigilant and become active participants in democracy. We are a free society. Corrective measures would surely arise from within the system and Indian democracy would emerge stronger from the churning now in progress.
STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Subhash C. Kashyap*

Introduction

This, perhaps, is not the best of times to attempt an objective analysis and evaluation of the state of democracy in India and to pronounce a judgement thereon. Current thinking and vision are badly battered and blurred by the unprecedented spate of corruption scandals of horrendous proportions and the distress of the people at the sky-rocketting prices of essential items of daily need.

The nation is passing through critical times. Our democracy is under severe strain. Faith of the people in the quality, integrity and efficiency of governmental institutions stands seriously eroded.

On the positive side, 2010 was a great year for Indian democracy. India got a seat on the high table of the U.N. Security Council. The heads of governments of all the five permanent members of the Security Council – the Big Five – paid official visits to India. India was host to the Presidents of U.S., France and Russia and the Prime Ministers of U.K. and China. Four of the big five (i.e. except China), Japan, Germany and others supported India’s candidature for a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. Performance of the economy in GDP terms was admirable. The new economic model in operation for nearly two decades had brought about accelerated growth.

We are very fond of bragging about our democracy being the largest and among the few really functioning democracies in the world. We felt flattered and elevated by the nice words of the U.S. President during his address to Members of Parliament. But, if we look around at the state of our polity today it would be difficult to feel proud. Before the closing of the year 2010, we were privy to several scams relating to the Commonwealth Games, the 2-G Spectrum Licenses, the Adarsh Society, the LIC Housing Loans, the Lavasa Hill Station project, the Neera Radia Tapes and the heavily subsidized foodgrains meant for BPL families in U.P. being diverted for sale in open markets elsewhere. These were enough to put democracy in India to shame. Never before, in living memory, in such a short span of time, so many scams of such

* Dr. Kashyap is Honorary Research Professor at the Centre for Policy Research and Editor of the monthly journal, South Asia Politics. Also, Advocate Supreme Court of India, he is former Secretary-General Lok Sabha (Parliament of India). His special field is Constitutional Law, Political Management and Parliamentary Affairs.
mind-boggling magnitude had hit the headlines. What was even more disturbing was the fact that all these scams revealed only the tip of the iceberg. Much more was hidden below the surface.

Ideally, Parliament as the supreme representative institution of the people could be expected to take serious note of the challenges to our polity posed by the giant scamsters. Members rising above their party differences should have seriously deliberated upon the ways to quickly identify and punish the guilty and devise systemic reforms to prevent recurrence of such scams. When the short winter session of Parliament began it was foreseen as most likely to be stormy and full of turmoil. But, from day one, the proceedings of the two Houses were stalled. The entire winter session ended without transacting any worthwhile business. It was rendered almost completely dysfunctional. The ritual laying of papers and the obligatory passing of supplementary grants were also a sham and a disgrace. Grants worth thousands of crores were declared passed without debate, in the midst of din, by a voice vote, in a matter of minutes. It was a sort of new record that in 23 days, the Lok Sabha met for 7½ hours and Rajya Sabha for 2 hours and 44 minutes only. Both the government and the opposition were responsible for this parliamentary scam involving hundreds of crores of public money. There could be no better evidence of the low levels to which respect of Members for Parliament and public money had descended. The basic issues of large scale corruption soon receded to the backstage and much of the focus came to be on the parliamentary logjam.

Not only did the scams involve alleged swindling of billions of public money by persons in high places, but these also had the effect of eroding the credibility of all the known institutional pillars of democracy – the Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary and the Media. Even some top men in uniform got tainted. One cannot underestimate the negative impact potential of the scams which overshadowed all the great achievements as also the new challenges confronting Indian democracy. No wonder, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh himself was constrained to express sadness on the non-functioning of Parliament and say that he was worried about the future of parliamentary democracy in India. More than half-a-century earlier, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru had asked whether with the demands of the people and the problems of Government having multiplied many-fold, the political structure and procedures of parliamentary democracy had become “out of date and may have to go” and “how far can parliamentary democracy be adapted to meet the new burdens and functions of government satisfactorily, effectively, and in time?” Answering the questions himself, Nehru had concluded that “our parliamentary system of Government, with all its failings” was better than all the others “which lead to some measure of authoritarianism”.

We can be proud, quite legitimately of our democracy but, Nehru said, “it does not mean that we should close our eyes to the grave problems we often have to face in the country and the disruptive tendencies that raise their heads and challenge the democratic process…”

**Concept of Democracy**

On a conceptual plane, neither development with a human face can be sustained nor lasting peace assured without strengthening the institutions of democracy. This is bound to be more particularly so in the developing countries. But, the questions that arise are: what precisely
do we mean by democracy, what criteria should be used for determining the state of democracy in a country at a particular point of time and lastly, how to measure performance.

Democracy defies precise definition. It has been variously defined. It has meant different things to different people. It has functioned differently in different socio-political climes and times. But, this much may be generally agreed that democracy is a system of governance based on popular will. The human tendency always has been for every society to regard its own received body of values as some kind of an immutable legacy and universal yardstick for all times and places. The western ideas of liberal democracy were originally conceived in a particular socio-political framework, in situations of feudalism and highly restricted franchise. Natural rights and natural law in the context of doctrines of \textit{laissez faire} meant basically the right of each individual to freedom of trade and enterprise, equality of opportunity in trade and business, freedom of contract and free competition. Liberty was conceived as absence of interference by the State. Right to property was put on a higher pedestal than right to life itself. Even slavery was justified under rights to property and to freedom of trade, contract and competition. That things changed and liberal democracy progressed to lay the greatest emphasis on human rights is another story.

The twentieth century closed with what was considered a world-wide triumph of western liberal democracy and free market economy. But, the first decade of the twenty-first century has thrown up a whole series of serious new challenges. It is important to realize that in every country, democratic institutions have to arise from its own soil, to suit its own environs and societal needs. Mere outward trappings of a liberal framework of democratic institutions, a charter of fundamental human rights and periodical elections may mean little unless they lead to real participatory role of all in decision making, clean and people friendly governance and all inclusive growth.

Criteria for Measuring State of Democracy

In what are called the advanced western democracies, nation building, some degree of education and economic affluence preceded the advent of institutions of democracy and constitutionalism. On the other hand, developing countries like India hoped that their Constitution and democratic polity will build each one of them as a nation, remove poverty and illiteracy and bring prosperity, economic growth and human well-being. Quite naturally therefore, the criteria for measuring the success of democracy had to be different and largely country-specific. Western yardsticks could not be entirely relevant or valid for determining the state or efficacy of democracy in non-western societies. Still, generally and ideally speaking, the following could be considered as the criteria for measuring the state of democracy:

- Level of Citizens’ participation in governance processes
- Free and fair elections of representatives on the basis of equality of rights for electors
- Citizen-centric governance with full transparency, responsiveness and accountability of government functionaries to the people with government officers functioning as servants of the people and not as their masters.
- Active and alert civil society
While there are multiple linkages between democracy and development, to measure them in quantitative terms is difficult. Also, development should not be measured merely in economic GDP terms. What is more important is effective human development, fulfillment of basic civic and social rights and general improvement in the quality of life for all.

**Contextualizing Democracy in Constitutional Terms**

In the name of “We, the people of India”, the Constitution makers decided to constitute India into a “Sovereign Democratic Republic”. What emerged as the most foundational principles of Indian polity were i) that India was one whole and we were one people of India (not the people of its different States). ii) that all sovereign powers vested in the people, and iii) that the people were to govern themselves through their elected representatives under a cohesive and inclusive democratic polity. Besides sovereignty of the people, democracy quintessentially implied national and individual freedom, rule of law and equality of all citizens before the law irrespective of their race, caste, religion, gender etc. and irrespective of the level of economic, educational or professional background. In a democracy, the people are supposed to be their own masters. They have an inalienable right to rule themselves, or to be ruled in the way they like and by the people they choose. Modern democracy has of necessity to be indirect representative democracy whereunder government is carried on and laws are made by the elected representatives of the people.

While democratic polity becomes one of the basic features of our Constitution which cannot be altered by any constitutional amendment, there are many variants of democracy which can be considered equally representative and legitimate. Democracy as it evolved in India and as it was conceived by the founding fathers had its own very distinctive character. The Indian experience repudiates the belief that democracy can be more successful in relatively more homogenous societies. India has shown that democracy can survive and succeed in a highly pluralist society as well. In fact, the Indian model of diversity may be said to have proved to be the greatest strength for democratic polity.

In India’s traditionally multi-religious, multi-racial, multi-lingual plural society united by a common history, civilisational identity and territory, ethnicity may cut across the dividing lines. In fact, the vast majority of its citizens have multiple identities. The same person may belong to different groups depending upon the distinguishing criterion of religion, language, community, etc. Since society thus gets divided both horizontally and vertically, there are hardly any monoliths left. Every religion has its sects, languages and dialects, and castes and subcastes. Members of almost every religious group would be divided by language, region and caste just as members of every linguistic group may be divided by religion, region, caste, etc. Almost every Indian has identities in terms of his religion, caste, language, state/region etc.

Under the special variant of Indian pluralism, the majority-minority syndrome does not apply to ethnic groups. In states like Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, for instance, the tribal populations are in majority but for that reason, they cannot lose their ethnic group status. Also, the same person may belong both to a majority and a minority, e.g. one may be in majority by religion and in minority by language or vice-versa. What divides, also unites. Religious affinity would unite co-religionists in various linguistic groups while at the same time dividing
each of the linguistic groups, e.g., language may separate a Tamil from a Bengali, but it brings together Tamil-speaking Hindus, Muslims and others under the unifying language umbrella. Similarly, while religion may divide the Hindus and Muslims, it may at the same time unite co-religionists in different linguistic groups.

It is felt that Western scholars who are more used to uni-linear historical models of homogeneity, find it very difficult to appreciate the most characteristic Indian reality which has been that of a special pluralism situation leading to unity and strength – rich variety of hues blending homogeneously into one whole. Through the ages, culture has been the greatest integrating force while politics has tended more to divide. It was so in the past. It is no different today.

We have adopted what may be called representative parliamentary democracy. Nehru favoured parliamentary democracy because, he thought, it was a “peaceful method of dealing with problems. It is a method of argument, discussion and decision, and of accepting that decision, even though one many not agree with it. However, the minority in a parliamentary government has a very important role to play. Naturally, the majority, by the mere fact that it is a majority, must have its way. But a majority which ignores the minority is not working in the true spirit of parliamentary democracy.”

The founding fathers tried to provide for the fullest representation by enfranchising all the vast adult population of the country. This is borne out by the provisions for universal adult franchise with all adults - men and women - having the right to vote (article 326) and the executive being responsible to the popular house of the legislature [articles 75(3) and 164(2)]. The Constitution ordains us to be a democratic republic. The concept of `republic' is that of a State in which the people are supreme, there is no privileged class and all public offices are open to every citizen without any discrimination. There is no hereditary ruler and the head of the State is elected by the people for a fixed term. He is usually called the President of the Republic. For Cooley, a republican form of government is "a government by representatives chosen by the people." In the words of Justice Hidayatullah: "A Republic is a State in which the supreme power rests in the final analysis with the people and not with a single individual like a king or the like." Democratic republic may, therefore, broadly mean a State with an elected head and a government by the representatives of the people. According to Madison in The Federalist:

"Republic is a government which derives its powers directly or indirectly from the great body of the people, and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure, for a limited period, or during good behaviour."

It is in the widest sense that the Preamble to the Constitution speaks of India being a Republic. With the commencement of the Constitution on 26 January 1950, India ceased to be a dominion and no more owed any allegiance to the Crown. The head of the Union is a President who is elected for a fixed term by an electoral college of the representatives of the people. All citizens are equal in the eyes of law, there is no privileged class and all public offices are open to every citizen without any distinction of race, caste, sex or creed.

Democracy conceived in merely political terms meant the right of every citizen to freely vote at periodic elections. The ‘one man, one vote' principle applied in all democratic elections
emanated from the recognition of equal rights of all men - whether highly educated or illiterate, experts, technocrats, industrialists or labourers. For our founding fathers, however, democracy did not mean merely political democracy or the people's right to periodically vote to elect their representatives. Right to vote for a hungry and illiterate man without clothing and shelter meant little. Dr. Ambedkar said:

“We do not want merely to lay down a mechanism to enable people to come and capture power. The Constitution also wishes to lay down an ideal before those who would be forming the government. That ideal is of economic democracy.”

Without social and economic democracy, political democracy had no meaning in a poor country like India. For Dr. Ambedkar, social and economic democracy was the real aim and ultimate goal. He said that parliamentary democracy was meaningless unless it was geared to achieving the real goal of economic democracy. Jawaharlal Nehru had observed later:

“We have definitely accepted the democratic process. Why have we accepted it? Well, for a variety of reasons. Because we think that in the final analysis it promoted the growth of human beings and of society; because, as we have said in our Constitution, we attach great value to individual freedom; because we want the creative and the adventurous spirit of man to grow.”

Democracy of his conception was only a means to an end. The end was the good life for the individual which must include a certain satisfaction of the essential economic needs. Only in the measure that democracy succeeds in solving the economic problems, does it succeed even in the political field. If the economic problems are not solved then the political structure tends to weaken and crack up. Therefore, from political democracy, we must progress to economic democracy which means "working for a certain measure of well-being for all". It could be called a Welfare State. But, it also "means working for a certain measure of equality of opportunity in the economic sphere". This is made clear by the words of the Preamble which speak of securing to all citizens of the Republic 'Justice, Social, Economic and Political'.

Justice means harmonization of interests between the individuals, between groups and between the individuals and groups on the one hand and interests of the community on the other. The concept of Justice in the Preamble is indeed very wide. It is not confined to narrow legal justice as administered by the courts. The Constitution is designed to realise socio-economic justice to all people including workmen. (All India Statutory Corporation V. United Labour Union, AIR 1997 SC 645). Social justice implies that all citizens are treated equally irrespective of their status in society as a result of the accident of birth, race, caste, religion, sex, title etc. Article 13 prohibits making of any laws inconsistent with Fundamental rights. Article 14 ordains the State not to deny to any person equality before the law and equal protection of laws. Article 21 guarantees right to life and liberty which has been interpreted by the Supreme Court to include the right to live with dignity, right to education, right to work and right to ones reputation. Article 22(1) inter alia lays down the right to consult and to be defended by a legal practitioner of ones choice.
The Supreme Court had declared that the right to life under article 21 and right to equality before law under article 14 included the right to legal aid. The Court underlined the importance of access to justice to all citizens – more particularly to the poor and the marginalized – as an essential characteristic of democratic polity. It constituted itself into the supreme defender of the rights of the people and decided to extend its power to do justice in matters of public interest by entertaining Public Interest Litigation and providing access to justice to millions of the under-privileged unable to seek justice.

It was realised early in the history of independent India that while in theory access to justice and enforcement of fundamental human rights were made equally available to all, the hard ground realities were that the vast majority of the poor, down-trodden, deprived, depressed, marginalized and the underprivileged, the women and the children were not able to seek or obtain either justice or enforcement of their fundamental rights. They suffered from ignorance and lack of financial means and legal assistance.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination or disability in the matter of access to public places. Article 38 enjoins the State to strive to promote the welfare of the people "by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice social, economic and political shall inform all the institutions of the national life". In the words of Jawaharlal Nehru: "Social justice has always exercised an appeal to sensitive persons. The basic attraction of Marxism for millions of people was not, I think, its attempt at scientific theory but its passion for social justice". Provisions for humane conditions of work, maternity relief, leisure, reduction of wide disparities, promoting of economic interests and a decent standard of living for the workers, weaker sections and backward classes, minimum wage, banning of forced labour (articles 23 and 43) were all directed towards social justice. [Sadhuram V. Polin, AIR 1984 SC 1471; Lingappa V. State of Maharashtra, AIR 1985 SC 389].

Justice Gajendragadkar had spoken of Indian democracy realizing that “the problem which concerns an overwhelmingly large number of its citizens cannot be successfully met unless it wisely uses its mighty weapon of law” – to provide equality of opportunity and economic justice to all citizens. However, Justice Gajendragadkar also warned us that mere passing of well-meaning laws could not be deemed to be a panacea. It was most generally believed in India, and not without legitimate foundations, that despite all the constitutional provisions of fundamental rights of non-discrimination and equality before law, the system worked unequally, the poor were unable to reach the courts and if they did, no justice could be expected when adversaries in the judicial process were not on equal footing.

As part of its creative jurisprudence, the Supreme Court has assumed the responsibility of intervening inter alia in situations where the legislature and/or the executive fail to perform their duty, in particular, when they fail to protect the basic rights of the citizens like the right to live a decent life in healthy surroundings or to provide an honest, efficient and just system of laws and administration. What has come to be called “Judicial Activism” was born as a corrective to inaction or failure of the executive and the legislature to provide clean, competent and citizen-friendly governance. The innovative judicial approach to “Public Interest Litigation” came handy
in case of acute social injustice, economic exploitation, denial of human rights, corruption and other offences against public interest.

Economic Justice would require that the rich and the poor are treated alike and that efforts are made to bridge the gap between them. In pursuance of the objective of economic justice, article 39 directs the State to try to secure that the citizens have an adequate means of livelihood, that ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good, that operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment, that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women, that women and children are not abused and citizens are not forced by economic necessity into vocations unsuited to their age or strength, and that the children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in freedom and dignity and childhood and youth are protected against exploitation etc.

In fact, various other articles in Part IV of the Constitution (articles 36 to 51) are also directed towards securing a new social and economic order imbued with justice. Thus, there are provisions for right to work, to education and to public assistance in certain cases, for just and humane conditions of work and maternity relief, for living wage etc. for workers, for free and compulsory education of children, for promotion of educational and economic interests of weaker sections, for separation of judiciary from executive etc.

Political justice means equal share to all citizens in the rights to participation in the political process without any distinction of race, caste, creed, religion or place of birth. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment and articles 325 and 326 provide for equal rights to all adults to participate in elections.

Founding fathers like Nehru and Ambedkar were quite clear in their minds that political justice was meaningless without economic justice. In our society ridden with religious, caste and creed discriminations, even economic justice was not enough unless it was coupled with social justice. Dr. Ambedkar had said:

"On 26th January, 1950 we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics, we will be recognising the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value".

Other preambular principles to which India’s democratic republic was committed were those of securing ‘Liberty’, ‘Equality’ ‘Fraternity’, ‘Dignity of the Individual’ and ‘Unity and Integrity of the Nation’.

‘Liberty’ does not mean mere absence of restraint or domination. It is a positive concept of the right to "liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship". It comprehends various freedoms later concretized in the Fundamental Rights part of the Constitution and considered essential for the development of the individual and the nation. Thus, for example, article 19 guarantees protection of rights of freedom of speech, expression etc. while articles 25-28
embody rights to freedom of religion including that of belief, faith, and worship. In this positive connotation, liberty would mean freedom of the individual to do what one likes. But, again 'liberty' has to be distinguished from license. The liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship as elaborated in the fundamental rights part of the Constitution has to be so regulated as not to endanger the security of the State, public interest etc.

The concept of equality in India’s Constitution is only that of equality of status and opportunity. This has legal, social, political and economic aspects. All are equal before law and enjoy equal protection of the laws of the land. There can be no discrimination between one person and another on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth in the matter of access to public places and public employment. All citizens are equally entitled to enjoy the political rights to vote and participate in the process of governance without any distinction. In the economic field, equality means that for the same ability and same labour, the salary would also be the same. Also, one man or one class would not exploit other men or classes. The concept of equality of status and opportunity has been given concrete substance and shape in articles 14 to 18.

The ideals of justice, liberty and equality are relevant and meaningful only inasmuch as these promote a common feeling of brotherhood, of Indian fraternity, despite all the racial, linguistic, religious and other diversities of many sorts. Provisions relating to common citizenship are directed towards strengthening Indian fraternal feelings and building a strong Indian fellowship. The fundamental rights guaranteed to all citizens without any discrimination and the Directive Principles directed at achieving social and economic equality are also designed to promote fraternity. The concept has been more specifically elaborated in the new Part IVA of the Constitution laying down the Fundamental Duties of the citizens. It casts a duty on every citizen inter alia to promote among all the people of India harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood and of belonging to one Indian family transcending all religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities. In fact, the concept of fraternity is far wider than the concept of secularism. It goes beyond separation of religion and politics, freedom of religion, equal respect for all religions etc. Unfortunately, not enough importance has been attached by the jurists and judges to this concept. Speaking on the need for the recognition of the principle of fraternity, Dr. Ambedkar remarked in the Constituent Assembly:

"What does fraternity mean? Fraternity means a sense of common brotherhood of all Indians - of Indians being one people. It is the principle which gives unity and solidarity to social life. It is a difficult thing to achieve".

There is also an international aspect of fraternity which takes us to the concept of universal brotherhood, the ancient Indian ideal of Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam - of the entire world being a family. This has been elaborated in article 51 of the Constitution under the Directive Principles.

Fraternity was expected to preserve and promote the dignity of the individual. In the minds of the founding fathers, dignity of the individual was of supreme importance. The objective was to improve the quality of life for the individual by guaranteeing the fundamental rights of freedom, equality etc. and by issuing guidelines to the State in the form of Directive Principles to so orient its policies as to provide to all citizens, inter alia adequate means of livelihood, just and humane
conditions of work and a decent standard of life. Article 17 as a fundamental right is directed at abolishing the practice of untouchability which was an affront to human dignity.

The rights of the common man were sought to be protected by an independent judiciary, provision of judicial review of legislation and making the validity of all laws subject to fundamental rights and assigning to the individual the right to move the highest court for the protection of one’s constitutional rights under Part III of the Constitution on Fundamental Rights.

In order to safeguard the dignity of the individual, we need to build the nation and protect its unity and integrity. It was only through a spirit of common brotherhood and fraternity that we could hope to build national unity in a highly pluralistic and heterogeneous society. Also, without unity and integrity of the nation, we could not succeed in our efforts at economic development and could not hope to preserve either democracy or the independence of the country and the honour of the countrymen. Article 51A, therefore, appropriately makes it the duty of every citizen to uphold and protect the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India and promote harmony and brotherhood. At least in matters which involve threat to the unity and integrity of the nation, it is expected of every citizen to forget all differences and rise above all considerations of self-interest.

Achievements and Failures

The period of six decades and more that has gone by was the most eventful. Developments moved at hurricane speed. Centuries got compressed into years. The nation faced a succession of grave crises and challenges of terrifying magnitude. India can take legitimate pride in that – some temporary aberrations like the 19 months of internal emergency apart – whatever problems we faced were resolved within the democratic framework of constitutionalism. On the political plane, by far our greatest achievements were to (i) bring about and maintain the unity and integrity of post-partition India, and (ii) preserve freedom and democracy. Representative institutions have thrived and we have remained a vibrant, functioning democratic polity.

Indian democracy has been widely hailed as the most stable in South Asia – the only one where the democratic system and the Constitution have stood the test of times and have endured and functioned. Despite once being labeled as a “soft state” or a “functioning anarchy” by Galbraith and Myrdal, the performance of India’s democratic institutions has been widely acknowledged as the best in what continues to be called ‘the third world’.

Indisputably, in India, the judiciary has remained independent, the press free and civil authority supreme. Right to Information and Rights to Education laws have been really the most revolutionary measures after the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments giving constitutional status to local self-government institutions of Panchayats and Nagarpalikas and moving closer to making Indian democracy more participatory by providing for compulsory periodic elections, gram sabhas and representation of women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. It is unique in the history of democracy anywhere to have 3.6 million elected representatives – more than a million of them women – as active participants in governance.
There has been some effort to give more space, voice, powers and responsibilities to local self-governing institutions through poverty alleviation, rural development and employment generation programmes more particularly directed at the under-privileged. Panchayati Raj institutions have been provided a substantial role in several of these programmes. For example, the Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana, Swarnjayanit Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Indira Awaas Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Yojana, Credit Cum Subsidy Scheme, Samagra Awaas Yojana, Innovative Scheme For Housing And Habitat Development And Rural Building Centres, Annapurna Scheme, Watershed Development Programmes, Accelerated Rural Water Supply Programme, Central Rural Sanitation Programme, Swajaldhara programme etc.

This is undoubtedly an impressive array of programmes to address the interests and needs of the under-privileged Common Man. On the whole, we can certainly take great pride in asserting that there is enough to showcase the long strides from representative to participatory democracy and to democratic governance with considerable space for the voice and interests of the common man.

There is, however, also another side of the picture. There is a wide gulf between the conceptual and the factual, between the rhetoric and the real. Many of the pro-poor programmes were totally meaningless and actually often turned out to be anti-poor.

Notwithstanding the lofty norms of democratic governance, the poor and the marginalized do not have the means to assert their legitimate authority against their exploiters and usurpers. Also, a question that can no longer be put under the carpet is that of determining who is really under-privileged? Also, how to ensure that the stigma of being the depressed and under-privileged does not become a matter of privileged status sought in perpetuity or a vested interest is not created in permanently remaining maimed and disabled to continue to be entitled to the support of crutches for all times. Dr. Ambedkar stood for a classless and casteless society and was opposed to the stigma of depressed or Dalit becoming permanent.

The large number of poverty alleviation programmes and projects have consumed a sizable portion of the national and State budgets but the results on the ground have been most disappointing. It is often asked where has all the money gone. Rajiv Gandhi is often cited for admitting that of every rupee sanctioned for the poor, hardly 15 paise reached him.

The really poor and deprived have hardly benefited from relief funds released in their names or from poverty alleviation programs. Even where some benefits have reached their categories, these have been cornered largely by the privileged amongst them or by the middle men.

The 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts have failed to transfer real power to the grassroots in many of the States with the M.P.s and M.L.A.s treating the new emerging leadership – particularly from the otherwise marginalized sections like women and SC/STs. – as rival centres posing threats to their leadership.
The electoral system had proved to be terribly divisive of society on caste basis thereby further isolating and damaging the deprived and marginalised as mere vote banks with the leaders developing a vested interest in keeping them backward.

Democratic governance is manipulated through use of flawed processes and use of money and mafia power. The week, the poor and the under-privileged become pawns in power games and for petty temptations barter away their space to the marauders of democratic governance. If that were not so, with the vast majority of the people of India being poor and in the category of the under-privileged, it should always be possible for them to occupy the largest space in democratic polity and to have their government catering primarily to their interests. But that does not happen and we are constrained to discuss the question of somehow providing them some space and some voice in democratic governance.

There have been fifteen general elections to Lok Sabha and a few hundred to State Assemblies. Despite the magnitude of the task of managing the largest ever (700 million plus) electorate on earth, all the elections have been universally acknowledged to be largely free and fair. With every election, the base of democracy has widened and nation building and development have continued through democratic mobilisation. The results of the most recent elections in Bihar have been interpreted as the victory of development agenda over caste vote-bank politics.

There have been repeated transfers of power between political parties and competing societal forces. The democratic polity had time and again overcome many pressures, stresses and strains inflicted on the body politic by malevolent forces, both internal and external. There were scores of significant achievements. To take the latest, despite the global melt down, India’s economy has remained reasonably stable. India could beat the worldwide recession because of a strong domestic market. We are said to be poised to achieve 9% to 10% growth rate.

It is another matter that the adoption of the new liberal economic reforms and free market policies brought to the fore all the evils of the capitalist system and the conflict between growth and equity. The few prospered at the cost of the many. The rich became far richer and the gulf between them and the poor widened. Consumerism and ostentatious display of affluence generated fresh tensions from those deprived of a share in the cake of development. Obviously, the aam admi was more contented in the atmosphere of the below 6% rate of growth. The end of the controls and permit-license raj, instead of reducing corruption made it massive. Democracy became subservient to big business and mafia gangs of smugglers and criminals. Money and success at any cost became the supreme values. The proclaimed ideals of economic democracy, distributive justice and inclusive growth became casualties.

Under the camouflage of the slogans of one world and a global village, ordinary citizens instead of being the masters in democratic polity have been increasingly reduced to being mere consumers of goods and services. The result is tremendous erosion in democratic rights and freedoms of the individual vis a vis the organs of the State substantially reducing the space for the voice of the poor and the underprivileged. In the words of the former President K.R. Narayanan:
“We find that justice—social, economic and political—remains an unrealized dream for millions of our fellow citizens. The benefits of our economic growth are yet to reach them. We have one of the world’s largest reservoirs of technical personnel, but also the world’s largest number of illiterates, the world’s largest middle class, but also the largest number of people below the poverty line, and the largest number of children suffering from malnutrition. Our giant factories rise out of squalor, our satellites shoot up from the midst of the hovels of the poor. Not surprisingly, there is sullen resentment among the masses against their condition erupting often in violent forms in several parts of the country. Tragically, the growth in our economy has not been uniform. It has been accompanied by great regional and social inequalities. Many a social upheaval can be traced to the neglect of the lowest of society, whose discontent moves towards the path of violence”.

Democracy implies attention to the development and well being of the poorest of the poor citizens of the nation. It must provide to the most marginalized and deprived sections of society equality of opportunity and right to live with dignity and in freedom from want and fear. The U.N. General Assembly had set some Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These included:

- Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieving universal primary education
- Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women
- Reduction in Child mortality
- Improvement of maternal health
- Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria etc.

India is far behind many of the other countries in achieving any of these goals by the stipulated 2015. Economic liberalization and freedom to market forces has led to erosion of the workers’ rights and to competitive consumerism with no thought given to the need for sustainable levels of consumption. The truth is that unemployment has increased, draughts and floods continue. While the granaries may be full, the poor continue to die of starvation or commit suicides in increasing numbers.

The number of landless labourers has increased. No body talks of land reforms now. The chief beneficiaries of various subsidies on fertilisers, diesel, seeds etc. are the big land owners. More and more agricultural land is being acquired for setting up industries, building shopping Malls, industrial townships, fancy housing complexes and tourist resorts. SEZ’s displace farmers by taking away their land which provided them sustenance for centuries. Core areas like energy, water, power, electricity, insurance, banking and even retail trade are being thrown open to foreign entrepreneurs. The poor and the deprived are the worst sufferers.

In the history of democracy world over, there never has been a fully developed or perfect democracy. It is always developing. Every challenge offers an opportunity to move farther faster. On the road to democracy there in no journey’s end. However, it cannot be denied that never before has Indian democracy been confronted with more formidable challenges than during recent years. Democratic institutions are passing through a critical phase. There is a general deinstitutionalisation of institutions and devaluation of democratic values. That there has been a
A steep fall in the standards of conduct in public life and administration is widely accepted. That there is a crisis of character and values in politics and public administration, is saying the obvious.

Growth of a certain cynicism towards normal democratic processes and an erosion of respect for political parties, politicians, legislators and civil servants, present a disturbing scenario. Nothing can conceal the truth that our democratic processes are still largely dependent on caste and communal vote banks and criminals and are run with colossal amounts of black money generated through crime and corruption and that the parties and leaders who present before the people opposite agenda and fight the polls against each other often commit a fraud on the electore by coming together after the polls to share the fruits of power.

To a very large extent, the present day crises and problems in governance have their source in the Constitution which we, the people of India were supposed to have given to ourselves in our Constituent Assembly on 26 November 1949. Actually, the Constitution of India was not entirely fully made by Indians in their Constituent Assembly. The Assembly did not have a tabula rasa to write on. The Constitution had had an organic growth through the various stages of the nationalist demands for self-governing institutions, struggle for freedom and reforms grudgingly and haltingly granted by the British. The primary concern of the British naturally was how to rule over India, keep the ‘natives’ week and divided and control and govern them. Finally, the Government of India Act 1935, the Cabinet Mission Plan 1946 and the Indian Independence Act 1947, all drafted by the British to serve their interests, contributed nearly three-fourths of the Constitution of India as it came out of the Constituent Assembly.

No wonder, the entire infra-structure of the Constitution remained colonial. The focus was on organization of the State apparatus, on a political system, on institutions of government, on division of powers, on functionaries and officers – their rights and jurisdictions etc. There was little emphasis on the principles of governance or traditional values of Indian political thought. Whatever little thought was given to governance got relegated to the non-enforceable ‘Directive Principles’ part of the Constitution. Perhaps, the only place where our Constitution uses the term ‘governance’ is in article 37 under the Directive Principles. Article 37 speaks of certain “principles” being “fundamental” in the “governance of the country” but not “enforceable by any court”.

These and other fundamental principles of good governance ordained by the Constitution are defiled, defaced and debunked openly almost daily and yet nobody can do anything. If these were given the status of enforceable fundamental rights, the story of the Constitution and the state of democracy in India in the 21st Century, would have been very different and much less distressing than what it is today.

It is often said that there was nothing wrong with the Constitution and if it failed, those working it must be vile. But, it cannot be ignored that the vile were the products of this Constitution – its demands, constraints, compulsions and the system established under it, for example, the electoral system under the Constitution encouraged and necessitated the role of vote mathematics – of vote banks, corruption, black money, criminalization, casteism, communalism, violence and mafia power.
Enough has been written on criminalization of politics and politicization of crime, all pervasive corruption, role of money, muscle and mafia power and caste and communal vote-bank politics. Other areas of concern include. (1) Union – State Relations, demands for further reorganization of States, decentralization of powers to grassroots, misuse of article 356, responsibilities for handling problems of jihadi terrorism and Naxalism, Maoism etc. sometimes acting in concert with their internal and external ramifications, (2) reforming and regulating by law the political parties and electoral system and processes, (3) systemic political reforms including parliamentary and judicial reforms and review of public administration – all with a view to ensuring citizen-centric, clean and corruption free, transparent and accountable government, (4) population control, (5) reservation policies and (6) the question of the rights of tribals, protection of environment and illegal exploitation of mineral resources.

The conduct of our legislators, ministers and bureaucrats and the goings on in the houses of our legislatures are matters of disgrace for Indian democracy. The system under which we live has led to and nurtured an axis between the businessman, the politician, the civil servant, the police and the criminal. In large parts of India, Marx seems to have been proved right as the State appears to have withered away. There is no sign of administration. Mafia gangs terrorise and rule. An ugly atmosphere of near anarchy prevails and even the thin dividing line between the politicians and criminals has disappeared. Earlier, the criminal sought the protection of the politician, now it is the politician who needs the protection of the dada or the two have become one and the same person. A prominent Communist Party (CPI) leader and a very fine man, Shri Indrajit Gupta as the Union Home Minister in the Janata Government, despite his leftist moorings, was not ashamed of confessing that he could do nothing to remove the role of crime and criminals in politics. Governments have lost their credibility, legitimacy and even their representative credentials. The degradation and erosion of democratic processes has reached such low levels that fighting elections has become impossible without several crores of rupees and private armies or goonda gangs. In big cities, slums are big business for the politicians/criminals.

The many fissiparous and divisive tendencies and ugly assertion of separate parochial identities are a negation of all concepts of ‘one India, one people’. Things have come to such a pass that some concerned citizens and thinkers have begun to see question marks against the democratic model adopted by us and operated for more than 60 years. In the midst of dismal poverty, abysmal illiteracy and alarming inequalities, a functioning participatory democracy, good governance, citizen-friendly administration, human development and nation-building are inconceivable.

The spectacle of unethically engineered or defection-manipulated majorities or of several successive hung Legislatures or coalition governments of disparate elements coming together solely for sharing the fruits of power and including some of the goon leaders with criminal records or otherwise doubtful antecedents, are all matters of grave concern. The price of legislators on sale is said to be running into several crores of rupees a piece.

Democracy has often been described as the government of the people, for the people and by the people. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in his concluding speech in the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949, however made the following pregnant remark: “Times are fast changing. People including our own are being moved by new ideologies. They are getting tired of government by the
people. They are prepared to have government for the people and are indifferent whether it is
government of the people and by the people”.

The most tragic development for democracy has been the sharp decline in the strength and
credibility of its institutions. The Legislature, the Executive, the Judiciary and even the fourth estate – the media – have suffered an image deficit. The Union Government does not enjoy the normal regard and esteem from the State governments. The collective responsibility of the Council of
Ministers has become a sham. The constraints of coalition politics create a situation where to remain
in power the Prime Minister and the larger coalition partner have to agree to be blackmailed by
small parochial parties demanding their pound of flesh, creamy portfolios and freedom to make
money. Ministers speak in different voices and disregard even the Prime Minister. The Prime
Minister himself is not an elected representative of the people. He is not the Leader of the House, not even the Leader of the party. He is a representative of the State of Assam in the Council of
States and a nominee of the Leader of the Congress Party in the seat of the Prime Minister. The
Council of Ministers with the Prime Minister at its head is not, in practice, the supreme executive of
the country. It is believed that the National Advisory Council is in the nature of a super-cabinet. The
institutions of the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers were never so devalued.

Much of the money doled out in the name of various pro-poor schemes and the large
subsidies under different heads ends up enriching the corrupt functionaries, business persons,
middlemen, officials and politicians. No wonder, despite all our pro-poor pontifications, India’s
position in the UNDP human development index is one of the lowest. It ranked at 134 among 182
countries vide 2009 Report and is at 119 among 169 countries according to the 2010 annual report.

People have seen the so-called representative democratic governments becoming
governments of the corrupt, by the corrupt. It is a highly competitive world and we have to strive towards excellence, reform and perform or perish. People need governments that can
govern. They want good governance and not merely government by the claimants in the spoils of
power in the name of representation. The policy of reservations has ceased to be a policy for the
upliftment of the deprived sections. It has instead become the vote-bank politics of always keeping
them backward and deprived. There is clamour for representation through reservation for newer and
newer categories. With the greatest respect to them, why are there no reservations for the disabled,
the blind, the deaf and the dumb, the illiterates, the below poverty liners – the list is endless – if we
really want that kind of representative government?

Good governance has to be limited constitutional government. It has to be democratic
government but for that democracy would have to rethink its fundamentals to suit the needs of the
21st century. Perhaps democracy as we know it is not enough. We have to revisit, reinvent and
revitalize it to save and serve the common man.

Today, there is a tremendous disconnect between the people and the politicians. There
can be no greater challenge to democracy than a sad scenario in which there is a clearly
perceptible erosion in the respect of the people for their own elected representatives. A very
distinguished senior parliamentarian remarked: “It will not be far wrong to say sorrowfully, that
there never was a time in living memory when politics and politicians were, almost rightfully as
denigrated, even degraded and sometimes detested, in the eyes of our people as they are at the moment”.

In fact, with majority of members of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies elected with minority of votes cast, the representative credentials of the representatives themselves have come do be questioned. When more votes are cast against the winners, how can they be called representatives of the people. Almost all parties and candidates are busy building their vote banks on the basis of caste, communal, linguistic or other such identities as with 15 per cent or so votes they can hope to win. There is all the advantage in the power game in playing divisive politics and building separate identities.

The picture is no better on the public administration front. A large percentage of civil servants have become servile or developed a nexus with the politicians in corruption and defrauding the people. They have not learnt the simple truth that in a democracy the people are the masters and all the functionaries of the State are and must function as servants of the people.

After all hope in the Legislature and Executive was lost, the Judiciary remained almost the last sheet anchor of the citizens’ hopes but of late even there things are no more rosy. The Courts have largely failed to provide speedy and inexpensive justice to the people. In the words of the Constitution Commission, Judicial system has not been able to meet even the modest expectations of the society. Its delays and costs are frustrating, its processes slow and uncertain. People are pushed to seek recourse to extra-legal methods for relief. Trial system both on the civil and criminal side has utterly broken down.

Costs of seeking justice are high which ordinary citizens can hardly afford. The lawyers are also guilty of charging unreasonably high fees – many partly in cash – and having little interest in early disposal of cases. Not all lawyers conform to any professional ethics. On one pretext or the other, the advocates representing the parties keep asking for repeated adjournments and judges gladly oblige. Also, on the slightest pretext, the lawyers proceed on strike thereby paralysing the judicial process, causing delays and adding to the cost of litigation. In the higher judiciary the holidays, closed days and vacation days outnumber the working days.

It is good to be told that for violation of fundamental rights, one can go straight to the Supreme Court but how many of the poor and under-privileged can afford to have access to the Supreme Court. Can anyone seriously assert that justice depends today more on the merits of the case than on the means of the litigant. Can it be said that pitted against a rich adversary hiring the costliest advocate a poor litigant fighting through a legal assistance advocate can hope to win on merits.

One of the most foundational norms of Indian democracy – sovereignty in the hands of the people - stands grievously eroded. During the last few years, it has come to be widely believed that the State has failed to provide security and meet our hopes, aspirations and basic needs. Security of the citizen is the primary responsibility of the state. But, the policeman in India, perceives his role as one of assisting the administration to control the people rather than of being a helper, friend and servant of the citizens. While colossal amounts of public money are
spent to provide security to those many of whom may deserve the security of jails, there is very little security for the ordinary citizen. The law and order machinery needs to be insulated from gross political influence and politicians. In this connection, the Police Commission and the Vohra Committee reports remain relevant. Democracy must be directed towards clean and quality governance as it affects the lives of the people.

After more than six decades of democratic rule and all the much bandied about programs, we have some 300 million people below poverty line. In absolute terms, we have more poor people today than at the time of independence. Also, we have the largest number and the majority of the poor of the world. The same is true of the illiterates. More than a lakh of villages still do not have drinking water. According to recent U.N. statistics, majority of Indians – men and women – are constrained to defecate in the open as they lack toilet facilities. Lakhs of children of tender age, laws notwithstanding, are subjected to high levels of insanitary conditions and work or beg in sub human conditions. As for national integration and unity, today we are more divided than ever before. Emotional divisions – differences and lack of mutual confidence in the hearts and minds of men – are more dangerous than the dividing lines on maps. Instead of coming together as members of the one Indian fraternity, we have become more and more separated from our fellow countrymen on grounds of narrow religious, linguistic, caste and other such loyalties. We are all anxious to find and strengthen identities other than the national. ‘Indian’ has become the smallest minority in the country.

Democracy presumes a general agreement on matters of national interest and public weal. But for power merchants, the highest value is vote mathematics. Religion, caste, sub-caste, language, region etc. come handy to divide the people, to create vested interests in their separate narrow identities. Religion, caste and even secular slogans are used to buttress vote-banks. No politician and no party can dare even to talk about population control or issues like dereservation in jobs at least for the creamy layer among the SC/STs and OBCs.

It has come to be believed that the rich and the powerful never get punished for their criminal deeds. Society runs on reward – punishment principles. It is necessary to make sure that rule of law prevails and in every case punishment is swift and certain. Indian democracy as it has operated has led to and nurtured an unholy alliance between the businessman, the politician, the civil servant, the police and the criminal. For the new breed of politicians, national interest is the last priority, if any. Power for its own sake, for getting rich quick or for other personal ends has become the supreme value. Those in government remain so occupied in the sheer survival struggle that they have no time for serving the people. The case for revising and renewing the character of Indian democracy is unassailable.

Unfortunately, despite 63 years of freedom, the ordinary Indian – the much touted aam admi – has yet to feel the glow of the dawn of freedom or the transfer of power to his hands. The colonial model of administration and the colonial mindset have continued with the people being still treated as the subjects and not as the citizens of a sovereign, democratic republic. While it has become a fad to blame the politicians for all our miseries, very little is done to educate and awaken the citizens in the matter of their citizenship obligations in a representative, participatory, democratic polity. The people themselves would have to rise, assert their civic sovereignty and become active participants in the process of democratic governance. Democracy
obligates the citizens to accept responsibilities. In a democratic polity, almost by definition, people have to be participants in processes of governance. Citizens have also to exercise constant vigilance over the conduct of those elected to public office. To save democracy ways and means have to be found for reasserting the will of the people over the organs and functionaries of the State and restoring power to the citizen where it belongs. Ultimately, the responsibility to save India’s freedom and democracy is that of “We, the People of India.”

The Road Ahead

From his study of the Problems of Governance, Bhabani Sen Gupta had concluded that the foundations of democratic institutions in India had been eroded beyond repair, that the Congress Party that held the nation together was in shambles, that the bureaucracy and the police had been politicized, that election process had been largely taken over by criminal elements and money power, that Parliament as an institution had become weaker and often dysfunctional and that even the judiciary was infected by corruption. In Short, according to him, there was a general degeneration of governance. Such a conclusion would be only a statement of half truth regarding a glass that is undoubtedly half empty.

We have to consider what changes are imperative to solve the main national problems of poverty, illiteracy, corruption, over-population, criminalization of public life, devaluation of values, crisis of character, casteism, communalism, black money etc. We have to ensure our nation’s socio-economic development and quality of life for all citizens. Since the representatives are supposed to be responsive to public opinion and pressure, quality of governance is dependent upon the quality of citizens. If the citizens are looking for undeserved or illegitimate benefits from the system through representatives’ favours, good governance can never take shape. This is a stupendous responsibility and calls for education in the values and responsibilities of good governance in a democratic polity.

The most difficult question is that of the mechanism for bringing about the needed reforms even if most of us arrive at some agreed suggestions. Those who can bring about the changes are the very people who have the greatest vested interest in the status quo. If more radical remedies are not to be advocated, we would have to be content with keeping up the efforts for creating greater awareness and building public opinion in the fond hope that one day, before it is too late, the elite and the people would wake up, arise and act to bring about the dawn of good and responsive governance and save our nation, freedom and democracy. Mere setting the agenda for action would not be enough. We cannot leave it to the government either. Blaming the politicians and the bureaucrats also would not do. We need to develop an awakened and aware activist citizenry. What we should be talking about is a citizen’s movement against corruption, criminalization and concentration of power, or, in short, a crusade for good governance. Unless the people themselves are prepared to fight it out, the vested interests shall never allow a citizen-friendly administration. After all, why would the beneficiaries of bad governance give up their benefits unless they are put under pressure and made to realize that it is in their own long term interest to agree to reform.

People need education in democracy and for democracy. Without an educated populace, democracy is a sham. All of us need intensive education in citizenship values in the duties and
obligations of citizens. The first and foremost duty of every citizen, therefore, is to be an active participant in the business of democratic government. Governance is too serious a matter to be left entirely in the hands of politicians and bureaucrats.

Nations are made only when people rise above their narrow self-interests and are prepared to make sacrifices for their fellow citizens. Unless we are vigilant and conscious of our obligations as citizens, there is no reason why freedom and democracy should continue forever. These plants are very fragile and unless nursed with care they are bound to wither away.

While the present state of democracy in India is distressing and a cause for serious concern, all is not lost. After all, we remain an open society. India is on the move. We are awake and seized of the problems that plague our democracy. The strength of democracy in a pluralistic society comes from its different components. India has survived in democracy and pluralism since millennia with unity in diversity, with multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multilingual, multi-religious groups and has built a dynamic and vibrant society. Democracy is the key for containing the aspirations of different under-privileged groups. They were ‘building blocks and not road blocks’ working within the Constitution. A delicate balance was necessary between diversity and integration and unity and uniformity. What is important is not the absence of conflicts but the strength and stability of democratic institutions protecting fundamental human rights and changing and adjusting to the needs of society and their conflict-resolution capacity. Democracy remains India’s U.S.P. That despite all the differences and conflicts, India survives as a united nation and a functioning democracy shows the inner strength and resilience of the people.

It needs to be flagged that all the recent scams have been unearthed and exposed by institutions of democracy under the existing system only. All those involved, howsoever high, are being proceeded against and are feeling the heat of investigations and the legal processes. There is open and free discussion in the academia, in the media and in all the public fora. The Comptroller and Auditor-General (C& AG) has done his job without fear or favour, the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament is examining the C & AG report. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is engaged in further investigations under the direct aegis of the Supreme Court. The Opposition in Parliament has continued to exert unrelenting pressure on the government. Already, Chief Minister of a State and a Union Minister had to quit their jobs. At last, some corrective measures including some fundamental systemic reforms may be on the anvil. These are signs of hope and a tribute to the strength, resilience and dynamism of Indian democracy.
Select References

Gupta, Bhabani Sen, *India - Problems of Governance*, Konark, Delhi, 1996

Gupta, Yogesh Kumar, ‘Rise of China and India’ in *South Asia Politics*, Vol. 9, No. 9, January 2011.


____, *Jawaharlal Nehru, the Constitution and the Parliament*, Metropolitan, New Delhi, 1990

____, *The Political System and Institution Building under Jawaharlal Nehru*, National New Delhi, 1990


____, *Our Political System*, N.B.T., New Delhi, 2008.

____, Blueprint of Political Reforms, Shipra, Delhi, 2003


____, *Institutions of Governance in South Asia*, Konark, Delhi, 2000
