



# Musings Reviewing Parliament And Parliamentarians

DR M.D. THOMAS

**M**y memory goes back to the last decade, which has a record of two unforgettable occasions when the parliamentarians of all the political parties were unanimous and thus made history. The first instance was when the 'proposals for reforming the electoral processes' were discussed. Without doubt, all the parties were in the same boat for the out-and-out denouncement of the proposals. The second occasion was the 'proposal for increasing the salary of the parliamentarians'. Obviously, there was a momentous enthusiasm and agreement on the proposal, which was instantly passed. These two occasions stand out as undeniable proofs of the fact that Indian parliamentarians are capable of clarity of purpose, thoroughgoing solidarity and

concerted action! But, the irony of the fact is that such consolidated position and action seem to occur only when they are faced by a common enemy or when it is a question of articulate benefit to them, that too, in an equal measure.

## Expectations of parliamentarians

Now the question that disturbs me as well as the responsible citizens of all communities of the country is 'what is the notion of the parliament the parliamentarians entertain' and 'what the parliamentarians understand about themselves'? It appears that a high percentage of MPs and MLAs are in the parliament for a dignified time pass or for making a certain type of business, if you allow me to say so. At least one third of them are notorious for the criminal record they have, verified or unverified. A good number of them are too old or too sick for the great responsibility they shoulder.

A considerable portion of them are under-qualified, if not illiterate, for their designated job or, in other words, they simply do not have the aptitude for the job in hand. A large number of ministers, MPs and MLAs are suffering from an enlarged ego.

Besides, most of the members of the ruling party or parties consider the opposition party or parties as enemies and are not inclined to give any credit to the opinions and suggestions they propose. The opposition party or parties very much seem to understand their duty, both inside and outside the parliament, merely to find fault with and oppose even the best of the measure proposed by the ruling party. It is as if 'causing nuisance to the other, not allowing the other to function, demoralizing and defeating the other and tapping a political mileage for oneself' situate the *raison d'être* of being in the



parliament.

### Something ails the democracy

I think, we need to forthrightly admit that something is fundamentally wrong with the phenomenon of democracy understood and practiced in our country, especially by the parliamentarians. Does democracy mean a public sanction to highhandedness for securing high political ranks and for doing whatever one wishes after that? I am sure, enlightened and responsible citizens, including a huge number of parliamentarians, will affirm that the parliamentarians have the sacred duty to perform a great mission to the country. But, given the anomalous dilemma mentioned above, how is it possible to translate this realization into a day-to-day reality? Most of the fairly well-meaning parliamentarians apologetically state that they too are the products of the country. When the morale of the country is so low, how could one expect a higher ethical fibre from the MPs and MLAs? This is indeed a valid point. The logic definitely makes sense. Therefore, it follows that until the country improves its own ethical quality, there is no point in discussing the distasteful situation in the parliament. Nevertheless, having said that, let me ask, have we proposed something to hope for tomorrow, even if we have not solved the problem for the present? I do not think so.

The argument sounds only a simplistic and escapist strategy to shield one's failure, which is certainly too naïve.

### Leaders are the 'led'

I would join those who ask questions squarely, why should such 'weaklings' go to public life at all, that too, to the apex body of national governance? How could the parliament be the right place for half-baked guys? Could persons of average and below average caliber, who earn a glamorous livelihood and enjoy high profile privileges, be justified at any rate? In fact, to my honest opinion, public life is to be attempted only by people who have an 'extra sense of duty' to the public, along with a capacity for high volt leadership, who are capable of placing the wellbeing of the nation and of the citizens at first place.

Besides, India is renowned as a religious country. But one would wonder where all the 'religiousness' of the country is hiding. Is all the 'sense of sacred' monopolized by the temples, masjids, gurudwaras, churches and other places of worship of religions? The best part of the Constitution of India is the 'secular spirit', which means a decentralized understanding of the sacred. The sacred is not only present in all religious traditions and non-religious ideologies, but also everywhere. The 'parliament is the national temple of the country'. If the

parliamentarians of this religious country get awakened to this reality and honour at least the most minimum of their sense of sacred in the parliament, I would frankly think, much of the problem could be solved automatically.

### Where do we go?

Without a doubt, the parliamentarians of the largest democracy of the world require being introspected, scanned and screened, in view of assessing their worth. It would be better if those scam-afflicted, scandalous and ill-performing Ministers, MPs and MLAs have the good sense to withdraw back home on their own. Those who are fairly good in their sense of integrity, transparency and accountability have to be trained for more qualitative output in their respective areas of operation. Those who play gimmicks to remain in the ground by hook or crook have to be guided by heads of the respective parties to find their way to the right place. The citizens have to be given the power to call back those MPs and MLAs who have not delivered anything worthwhile in line with the promises they have made and thus defeated the expectations of the people.

Moreover, those with negative records have to be once and for all investigated and followed up with fast track verdict and appropriate action. Unnecessary high profile privileges and VVIP-VIP provisions have to be abolished, in favour of the spirit of 'nishkaam karma', which is the spirit of the 'raj-dharma' of the country. The parliamentarians need to be facilitated to keep in regular touch with the social processes of the common man at the grassroots, so that they remain democratic in their basic tuning and quality. 'A sense of sacred, a sense of dignity, a sense of responsibility, a sense of accountability as well as a spirit of collaboration and team work' are the noble values our parliamentarians need to be endowed with. To enhance the relevance of the parliament and the effectiveness of the parliamentarians a radical transformation in their mindset is called for. This, I honestly think, is the biggest challenge India, the emerging democratic power of the world, is facing, in the 21st century of ours. Our capacity for crisis-transformation will decide the brightness of our future!

Feedback on:-

reporter@dayafterindia.com



MPs inside Lok Sabha at Parliament House in New Delhi

