

Dare We Hope?

■ Dr. M.N. Buch

Prof. Swaminathan, a distinguished retired Professor from IIT Delhi, spoke to me about how concerned he is about recent development in India. Recently a young lady who lives in New York and is involved at senior levels in the international education scene had visited her mother, accompanied by her four years old daughter. The lady is very conscious of her Indian roots and living in New York she is trying to bring up her daughter as an Indian. However, she said that considering how unsafe India has become for women she would hate to return and try to bring up her daughter in India. Since I have known her as a child I was deeply shocked that a lady, who has studied throughout in Indian schools and colleges, living happily in hostels, should suddenly begin to feel this about her own country. My son lives in the United States and says that he finds India too chaotic a country to live in. Mind you, this is not Katherine Mayo writing about India in what Mahatma Gandhi described as a gutter inspector's report. This is a senior professor, a professional young lady and my own son, a computer specialist. Have we suddenly slid to a position where even those who are innately Indian are beginning to have doubts about their own country? Has sixty-seven years of independence brought us to a situation where a wretched country like United States can dare to arrest one of our diplomats and ill treat her, the Chinese can violate our boundaries with impunity, Professional Entrance Examination Boards such as that of M.P can, through wholesale bribery, manipulate examinations in such a way that totally ineligible students can get entry into medical and technical education after paying hefty bribes? Has our police become so inefficient, our administration so impotent that suddenly no Indian woman can be safe at the work place, in the streets or at home? Is this all the result of media exposure of what always existed or is there a total collapse of moral values? Can this situation be improved?

Of late I have been deeply distressed at the trends not only in the political world but in every aspect of life in India. I have written so often that 1967 was the watershed year in which the game of purchasing power through outright bribery started and soon became endemic. Legislators found that they could command a price, which had to be paid if power was to be acquired. Once power was thus purchased then money had to be found to hold on to power and subsequently to renew it. This corrupted the entire system because such money can only be obtained through illegal means. Now power became both the means and the end of all thoughts of welfare, the public good, principled government and personal integrity went by the board. To this was added the attempt in 1975 by Indira Gandhi to establish authoritarian rule through proclamation of a State of Emergency. A system corrupted by purchase of power was now further attacked through authoritarian rule where all accountability was dispensed with. This combination was the recipe for national disaster.

There are many consequences which have flowed from the events in 1967 and 1975. The worst of these is the emergence of competitive populism. The partner of such populism is wholesale opportunism because the two go together like a horse and carriage. Such populism means that decisions of government are taken on the basis of immediate expediency, there is neither rationale, nor reason, nor a long term view of consequences because the objective is not good government but somehow clinging on to power now and to hang on to it in future. A

government or a political party which depends on populism and expediency cannot have an ideology, a doctrine or a platform of programmes which together promote what the party stands for in consonance with the welfare of the people. Now nothing is prohibited in politics, not even corruption, intimidation, inducement, or even murder. That is what our politicians have reduced us to and where does this leave any room for hope?

I take heart from the fact that when the extreme *Brahminical* distortion of religion overtook the *Sanatan Dharma*, out of *Dharma* itself emerged Gautam Buddha and Buddhism. When Buddhism reached its apex in India the Sanatan Dharma made a comeback because *Adi Sankara* who, through the philosophy of *advaitya* cleansed the Faith of corruption, the religion made a comeback and Buddhism retreated in the country of its origin. Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekanand performed a similar service, just as the Sufis, including Amir Khusro, brought Islam back from Wahabi extremism to the more liberal religion which Allah had revealed. In politics, too, such reform is possible. JP Narain's Sampoorna Kranti was an attempt to focus the anger of the people at misgovernment. The movement started as an agitation, very close in its ideology and execution to Mahatma Gandhi's satyagraha. Unfortunately its goals were not clear and, therefore, Sampoorna Kranti first became entirely agitational and subsequently disorderly, indisciplined and in many places, violent. It thus became vulnerable and was crushed by Indira Gandhi, but the fact remained that Indians could be brought to anger, which could erupt. Hitherto the masses had deemed to be docile, even inert. The second attempt at such reform was Anna Hazare's anti corruption campaign, soon to be usurped by Arvind Kejriwal. The fundamentals were sound but the dogma was flawed and it is the dogma which determined action. In the case of Kejriwal it became what President Pranab Mukherji very aptly described as "populist anarchy". The way the Aam Admi Party Government is performing it creates a sense of *déjà vu* or a "been there, done this". Like the Sampoorna Kranti movement the agitational approach is favoured and the Aam Admi Party is also likely to self-destruct because it fails to provide good government.

This article is not a critique of JP Narain or Arvind Kejriwal. It is an article on whether there is hope. I see hope in the fact that the people of India can be angry at what they sense to be bad government. This anger can coalesce and explode. If it is well directed and organised, made amenable to discipline and then properly focused this gives us that ray of hope which will disperse the miasmatic clouds of political despair and instead help the Indian electorate find the path to electing those who hold out hope of good government. Because of this I do dare to hope.
