

What Do We Mean By Governance?

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The scheme of the Constitution is that we elect members of the Legislature, Parliament in the case of the Union and the Legislative Assembly in the case of States. After the elections the party or groups of parties which enjoy the confidence of the House request the President or Governor to appoint their leader as Prime Minister or Chief Minister as the case may be. The Head of State then appoints the other ministers on the recommendations of the Head of Government and then the government proceeds to administer the country or the State. Obviously the government, which has been elected on the basis of a manifesto setting out its agenda of governance, will function in a manner such that this agenda is fulfilled. That applies to the present government at the Centre also.

2014 was one of the landmark years of our republic because after a gap of thirty years one single party achieved an absolute majority in the House of the People and the era of unstable coalition government ended. This is also the year which saw a substantial eclipse of the Congress Party which had ruled India directly or as the leader of a coalition for the major part of our independence. The Congress was considered a middle of the road political party which had a publicly pronounced commitment to secularism. The present government which consists of the BJP is deemed by centrist and left of centre parties to be pro Hindu, which is interpreted ipso facto to be communal and anti secularist. Of course this is hotly denied by BJP. These are issues which now largely have only a political context because any party which comes to power in India has to live with our admirable secular heritage and in the knowledge that though the majority of our population is Hindu, Hinduism itself is not homogenous or monolithic and that Hindu society itself has several divisions and sub divisions based on caste, denominations, region, etc. At the same time after Indonesia India has the largest Muslim population in the world, it has a substantial Christian population and a vast majority of Sikhs, Jains and Parsees live in India. There is also a sizeable Buddhist population and the concentration of these various religious is such that India has one Muslim majority State, one Sikh majority State, two Buddhist majority States and three Christian majority States. A government which ignores these facts and tries to convert the country into a theocratic State is doomed to failure and, therefore, notwithstanding sporadic references to Hindutva, in its functioning government has to follow a secular line because every community has to be carried along if the country is to prosper. Undoubtedly there are signs of an aggressive Hindu assertiveness which is a cause of worry, but the fact is that Narendra Modi knows that this country cannot be governed, nor can he achieve his development goals, if there are divisions along communal lines and, therefore, he is trying to achieve in his own way a reining in of the Sangh Parivar and extremist Hindu elements in the matter of Hindu polarisation. The secular forces would be well advised to let the Prime Minister do this on his own terms instead of constantly harping on a so called Hindutva agenda as being the identification mark of this government.

Vishnu as the Vaman Avatar straddled the universe in exactly two and a half steps. Narendra Modi is not the Vaman Avatar and, therefore, cannot complete his development agenda by taking those two and a half strides. Time, the availability of financial, physical and human resources, the normal gestation period of projects and opposition from parties which would rather see the government fail than encourage rapid development are all factors which would limit what can be achieved by government. This is not being stated as an excuse for possible inadequate achievement in the near future, but a wise Prime Minister would certainly take these factors into account when deciding on specifics of development in the next few years. That is why one has to begin with a wish-list and then narrow it down according to predetermined priorities. Let us take one example, that of Swachh Bharat. Government must determine what it intends to spend on providing minimum basic services to slums, settlements of the poor and villages which have no services so that within a tranch of five years the predetermined number of areas receive these services and on that basis have access to clean water, drainage and sewerage and solid waste collection. If this is combined with a maintenance schedule, then

before the next elections something substantial would have been achieved in the effort to keep India clean. Not only must funds to be earmarked but the authorities for implementation must be identified, trained, motivated and then supervised so that there are achievements in the field. In other words, the programme is taken out of the world of rhetoric and firmly planted in the world of real action. In this accountability has to be spelt out at every level so that by the time of the next election, results can be seen in the field, to be replicated till the whole of India becomes a Swachh Bharat.

The Ganga Plan is different in that it is not a part of the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. However, because almost forty percent of the population of India lives in the Ganga basin, making the Ganga pollution free could automatically extend cleanliness to about forty-five to fifty crore people. What applies to the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan will also apply, though in considerably magnified form, to the Ganga. Setting out of priorities, allocation of resources, setting up of a machinery for planning and implementation, fixing accountability, careful supervision and insistence on achieving goals within the prescribed time frame, together with a schedule of maintenance is how one should approach the Ganga. Once again the effort should be to prescribe realistic goals and then to ensure that they are achieved.

Development in its widest meaning implies substantial growth of production in the secondary and primary sectors, which means industry and agriculture. There are many reasons why agricultural growth is slow, of which the availability of irrigation water is one major factor. The experience of the Punjab Agriculture University and the Pantnagar Agriculture University clearly shows that with research at the university level, especially in terms of seed, cropping pattern, agricultural technology, etc., and their application in the field because they have been proven in the university farms and are readily accepted by the farmers proves that technology has a very big role to play in pushing agricultural growth. If this sector is viewed realistically, with research to farm, farm to product, product to market, market to processing and then market and processing to the consumer, we can bring about not one but a continuous agricultural revolution in India, benefiting the farmer, improving nutrition and making available affordable food stuffs to citizens at large. Simultaneously there can be a boost given to agro based industries with the field providing the basic raw material for production and industry using it for manufacture. This is only a statement of the obvious, but once again government has to determine both immediate and long term goals and on that basis plan the inputs into agriculture which gives the desirable outputs. In other words, we need very strong and realistic specifics to push the primary sector towards optimisation.

The secondary sector, as China has amply proved, is a major power house of economic development. It brings technology to the country, it forces us to ensure skill development of people who will work in industry, it makes us look at the environmental impact of industry so that we can work out methods of minimising or even eliminating the adverse impact. It creates jobs and gives us tangible products which can be marketed. China opened itself up as a production hub for industrial houses throughout the world and in a way Prime Minister Modi's call for 'make in India' is along these lines. China was and is a country governed by the Communist Party, but it has had no hesitation in inviting the corporate sector to set up house in that country. Surprisingly, though India is not governed by the Left, the entire opposition, on account of some nameless fear of India being taken over by multinational corporates, is strongly resistant of the move to invite industry to establish in this country. In this the opposition is trying to apply every known and unknown obstructionist tactics to ensure that industry cannot be established without many road blocks. This drives away potential investors. Almost every legislative proposal of government to ensure the smooth induction of manufacturing houses has been obstructed by the opposition by not permitting Parliament to function. In the matter of land acquisition, labour relations, insurance, access to natural resources Parliament has not functioned and government has been forced to adopt the Ordinance route. On the one hand the Opposition will not allow democratic discussion of legislation in Parliament, on the other it decries Ordinance as harbingers of dictatorship. Do people want that this government also functions in limbo where nothing moves forward or should government be bold in the achievement of its development goals? Obviously Narendra Modi is not the kind of person who will countenance inaction and,

therefore, he will certainly use all the legal and constitutional means at his disposal to try and implement his programme of development. This would include the use of Article 108 of the Constitution to legislate through joint sessions of both Houses of Parliament in case the Opposition proceeds with its negative tactics. In a way the BJP is being paid back in its own coin because it, too, had obstructed the sittings of Parliament for long periods of time, but at some stage our politicians must be mature enough to know that tit for tat is not the best way of governing a country.

God forbid that the Opposition should ever be weakened enough not to be able to question government or to aspire for future power. At the same time, because we follow the British Westminster style of democracy we have to follow the British practice of the Opposition calling itself 'Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition'. Therefore, opposition has to be on issues, not on account of ensuring that government does not function. That is a very negative approach. Ultimately it is also anti people because the electorate gives a mandate to the ruling party to govern and deliver and an Opposition whose sole objective is to ensure that the government fails is in fact contradicting its own mandate given by the people to call the government into question and ensure that it delivers good government to the people, and does so honestly. The people's mandate to the Opposition also is to offer an even better programme of government so that at the next election the Opposition can come to power. The mandate of the people to both government and the Opposition is a positive one and any negative action by either is a betrayal of the people.

This is to wish everyone, including Government, the Opposition, the people and the country all the very best for 2015.
