

Nature Vs Nurture

Nature has bestowed upon each individual a unique set of talents and abilities. Whether it's singing, scientific brilliance, or any other skill, some individuals seem to possess innate gifts from birth. Singers with naturally beautiful voices, for instance, often find themselves effortlessly excelling in their field without much external guidance. Similarly, renowned scientists like Albert Einstein, Isaac Newton, and Galileo Galilei exhibited exceptional intellectual prowess from a young age, laying the foundation for their groundbreaking discoveries. Their talents seemed to emerge spontaneously, without the need for extensive nurturing or mentorship.

While innate talent is undoubtedly valuable, the nurturing of that talent through mentorship, guidance, and practice is equally essential. Hard work has been shown to be a crucial factor in achieving success, often surpassing the advantages of raw talent alone. Individuals who grow up in environments conducive to their chosen profession, surrounded by successful role models, have a greater likelihood of reaching their full potential. In such environments, individuals receive the necessary support and resources to hone their skills and excel in their field over time. Thus, the nurturing provided by one's environment plays a vital role in shaping one's future accomplishments.

Development Vs Appeasement

OMKAR DATTATRAY

The biggest electoral exercise of the world is taking place in India and the sagacious voters of this democracy are exercising voting exercise to elect a new government at the central level. The elections are for electing the representatives who will govern the people in accordance with the wishes of the people and according to the constitutional provisions. There are a number of issues before the electorate on the basis of which they vote. But this year's general election is the vote between development, performance and appeasement and therefore we can say that the current general election is the referendum between the development and appeasement. There are the political parties and politicians who focus on the development, delivery and performance and the last decade of the ruling of the NDA/BJP was one of performance and was all for development and the common man has seen and experienced development and delivery of services. On the other hand there are political parties who believe in the politics of appeasement and they lure and attract voters on the basis of appeasement politics and to be more specific these political parties have only one point agenda that is appeasement of minorities. This minority appeasement is the biggest hurdle and obstacle in the development journey of the country and therefore the conscious voters should reject such political parties who advance the politics of appeasement and instead should vote for those political parties which stand for development and put forth the developmental plank as their election manifesto and in the present general elections such parties are BJP/NDA and therefore it is in the interest of the country that people should vote in their favor. The minority appeasement strikes at the very roots of our democracy and is the negation of our roots and essence. Thus the people should reject such parties who chose appeasement as a means and medium to reach to power and mind there is no dearth of such political parties who believe in appeasement politics as a means of reaching to the corridor of power and such parties play appeasement politics openly little knowing that appeasement politics is against the welfare of the people and also against the nation. There is no place for appeasement politics in our diverse country, but the political parties chose the appeasement as a tool to reach to power and thus do appeasement politics. But our developing country with a huge population needs development oriented politics and therefore those political parties should be given our valuable vote which advance the development of the people and also do performance. Parties should do and should play developmental politics. The BJP is one such party whose whole manifesto is full of development and is performance and delivery oriented and it is thus rightly called as the Vikas Patra as it is full of promising development to the nation and therefore BJP's Sankalp Patra versus INDIA, Nyay Patra and appeasement is all which is going to decide the fate of the parliamentary election. Thus on one side is the BJP/NDA and on the other extreme is the congress and INDIA and it is upon the voter of this country. In other words on one side are those parties who advocate and guarantee and promise development and on the other side are those opposition parties who play the appeasement card to gain access to power and thus the choice is upon the voters who can chose the right representatives to govern themselves. Therefore the current Lok Sabha elections is between the party or parties which proclaim and espouse development versus those parties which believe in appeasement politics and then it is the duty and responsibility of the voters to make the choice of the right candidates who will govern in the best interests of the people. At the end of the day, it seems that the voters will put their seal of approval by voting in favor of those parties which stand for development, performance and believe in delivery of the services and essential requirements and so the people will vote for development and not for appeasement and will so reject the parties which play appeasement politics and therefore the people will make the right choice of electing the right candidates who believe and promise development and the parties which stand for appeasement will be rejected in the final analysis.

Thus the people will vote for those political parties which promise development and which work for providing the needs of bare existence and will reject the parties and forces which give importance to appeasement politics. So it is crystal clear that the voters will make a right choice of choosing such candidates which promise and guarantee development and will reject those parties which believe in appeasement as a tool of winning the polls and the people will reject such parties which espouse appeasement as a medium of reaching to power. The Sankalp Patra as the BJP calls its manifesto is through and through development oriented and there are no freebies in this manifesto and it guarantees development and it does not show populist schemes as the BJP does not believe in sheer populism but believes in performance and delivery of the services. So the BJP is riding on the wave of 400 par coupled with Modi wave and at the end of the day it seems that louts will bloom for the third time in succession. The congress and INDIA bloc is making serious efforts to dent the image of BJP but it is not that easy to spoil the chances of the BJP so far as it concerns to returning to power for the third time but the opposition parties are making earnest and serious efforts to block the BJP's road to reach to power.

However the opposition parties will not be able to foil the sincere efforts of the BJP of gaining power. Therefore the appellation will turn in the favor of the BJP come what may as the promise and guarantee of development will work as a catalyst to gain power at the general elections. So in brief it can be opined that the current electoral battle is between the parties which promise development and those parties which stress appeasement politics as a means to reach to power.

(The author is a columnist, social and KP activist)

Celebrating Democracy & Rural Empowerment through PRIs

DR. PARVEEN KUMAR

Father of Nation, Late Mahatma Gandhi; the greatest champion of democracy and empowerment of rural masses had once remarked that 'My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbors for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is a necessity'. His views and desire finally took the shape in the form of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Panchayati Raj, a synonym for democratic decentralization refers to a system of local self government where local peoples plan for themselves and then take decisions regarding their development. These institutions of local self government are unique ones. The notion of local self-governance has deep roots in India, with village councils (Panchayats) existing for centuries. These traditional Panchayats served as forums for discussion, dispute resolution, and decision-making at the community level. Underlying the importance of this basic structure, father of Nation Late Mahatma Gandhi strongly also believed in Gram Swaraj and called for transfer of power to rural masses and always felt that villages should govern themselves. This system is prevalent in countries throughout Asia. India is a democratic country. De-centralization of power structure in a democratic way is vital for any democracy to flourish and to ensure that the results of development reach to persons standing in the last of queue. The Directive Principles for the State Policy (DPSP) enshrined in the Indian constitution says that the State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. Keeping this in mind the then Prime Minister of India Pt. J. L. Nehru constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta to devise an appropriate structure for democratic decentralization at the grass root level. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended to the then Union government to realize this statement in the DPSP into actions, through a system of local self government and thus paved the path for the Panchayati Raj systems in India. It is a three tier system of the local self-government that aims towards effective implementation and coordination of various rural activities to benefits lakhs of its rural population. The three tiers of the Panchayat system in India is village Panchayat comprising of different Gram Sabhas at village level, Block Panchayat or the Mandal Samiti at the block level and Zila Parishad or the District Panchayat at the district level. Pt. Nehru himself laid the foundation of Panchayati Raj in district Nagaur of Rajasthan in 1959.

HISTORY OF NATIONAL PANCHAYATI RAJ DAY: The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act was passed by the Parliament in April 1993. Through these two amendments the power to rule is given to the citizens, the power is transferred towards the grassroots levels. The passage of this amendment act is hailed as one of the defining moments in the history of free India. It permitted states to take effective steps to organize village Panchayats. It institutionalized the Panchayati Raj through the village level, intermediate and district-level Panchayats. To symbolize

this step towards the rural development, Dr. Manmohan Singh the then Prime Minister of India in 2010 declared 24th April as the first National Panchayati Raj Day. Since then it is celebrated annually on April 24th in India to commemorate the historic day when the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act came into force in 1993. With the passing of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act in 1992, Panchayats were officially recognized as India's third tier of government. This amendment introduced a three-tier system of local governance in India, with Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at the village, block, and district levels.

THE STATISTICS ABOUT PRIs: Currently, there are nearly 2.63 lakh Panchayats & about 31.47 lakh elected representatives (ERs) of PRIs of which 14.54 lakh (about 46.20%) are women. The Constitution empowers the States to devolve powers to the Panchayats to discharge their functions as institutions for local self-governance. Under the 15th Finance Commission for the period 2021-26, an amount of rupees 236, 805 Crore has been recommended for these rural local bodies.

FUNCTIONS ENTRUSTED TO PRIs: The constitution of the country has identified 29 functions to be performed by PRIs. The Panchayats have been entrusted to carry out different functions. The State Legislatures have the legislative powers to confer on Panchayats such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. Panchayats are responsible for overseeing and implementing various rural development programs and initiatives, including schemes related to agriculture, water and sanitation, education, and health. They have a crucial role to play in the development of rural infrastructure, including the construction of roads, bridges, schools, and healthcare facilities. Panchayats are responsible for ensuring effective local governance and administration. They have the responsibility of preparing plans and implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice. They are involved in decision-making processes related to developing and managing local resources and providing public services. PRIs are also responsible for managing local finances and resources, including preparing budgets and mobilizing funds for various development initiatives. These institutions also promote social empowerment and development, particularly for marginalized communities. They work to address issues related to gender, caste, and poverty and strive to create inclusive and equitable communities. Besides PRIs also play a key role in environmental protection and conservation, particularly in rural areas.

They work to promote sustainable development, conservation of natural resources and mitigate the negative impacts of environmental degradation. A state may authorize a Panchayat to levy, collect taxes, impose duties, tolls, fees etc. The grants-in-aid may be given to the Panchayats from the Consolidated Fund of the State for the development of the area. There is also a provision of Nyaya Panchayat in each Panchayat so that minor litigations could be solved at the village/Panchayat level.

On this day to recognize the efforts of different Panchayats in the

country, the Union Government also presents awards to the best performing Panchayats in the country. These awards include the Deen Dayal Upadhyay Panchayat Sashaktikaran Puraskar (DDUPSP) in general and thematic categories for all three levels of Panchayats. The nine thematic categories include sanitation, civic services, natural resource management, marginalized section, social sector performance, disaster management, community based organizations, innovations in revenue generation and e-governance. The Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar (NDRGGSP) is given to the Gram Panchayats (Village level) for outstanding performance of Gram Sabha. The Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) award is given to three best performing Gram Panchayats across the country. The e-Panchayat Puraskar is given to states for the outstanding performances for e-enablement of Panchayats. Creating a conducive atmosphere for the healthy growth and development of children is basic to social development, the Child friendly Gram Panchayat award (CFGPA) was announced in 2019 for best performing Gram Panchayats one in each state/UT for adopting child friendly practices.

The National Panchayati Raj Day thus gives us an occasion to celebrate grassroots democracy enabling decentralization of power to grassroots where rural communities participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives. It empowers villagers by providing them with a platform to voice their concerns, needs, and aspirations directly to their elected representatives. It is also a day to showcase the success stories of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in various aspects like education, healthcare, infrastructure development, and rural livelihood creation. The day is also a reminder to renew the commitment of government to work for strengthening Panchayati Raj and promoting inclusive development in rural areas. The day motivates PRIs to actively work towards addressing local challenges like poverty, sanitation, and environmental degradation. It encourages PRIs to adopt innovative approaches and best practices to deliver better services and improve the quality of life in rural areas.

Panchayati Raj Day helps bridge the gap between the government and rural communities, leading to more responsive and accountable governance.

Unfortunately, there have been some reports where these grassroots institutions being misused. Instead of becoming participatory they have become representative in character; representing the interests of few influential persons in the society. The women folk were given representation in these local self government institutions. Seats are reserved for them in Panchayats. But despite of winning and getting elected to different posts, their husband are ruling their Panchayats. Honorable Prime Minister has also called for an end to the practice of 'husband of women Sarpanches' or 'Sarpanch Pati' exercising undue influence on the work of their wives elected to power. It is the duty of every elected representative to uphold the participatory and inclusive character of these institutions. Only then the dream of Gram Swaraj would be achieved.

(The author writes on agriculture and social issues).

Women Empowerment through Panchayati Raj System

DR. BANARSI LAL

Every year 24th of April is celebrated as the National Panchayati Raj Day in India. This day marks the passing of Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 that came into force from 24th of April, 1993. The development in any society would be slow if women who constitute about 50 per cent of population are not facilitated to participate in the developmental activities. India with a female population of over 600 million possesses a vast reservoir of women power which exceeds the combined total population of South-East Asian countries. In the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution for the first time in the history of India, minimum numbers of seats were allotted to women in Panchayats. Meager representation of women in the state and national legislatures, reservation not less than one-third of the total number of seats and chairpersons of Panchayats should be considered a significant landmark in the process of political empowerment of women. Clause(3) of Art.243-D inserted in the Indian Constitution by the 73rd Amendment Act provides that not less than one-third of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a Panchayat. Clause (2) of Art.243-D provides that not less than one-third of the total number of seats shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes or Schedule Tribes. Seats for these marginalized sections of the society should be provided in every Panchayat in proportion of their respective population in the total population in each Panchayat and such seats have to be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in the Panchayat. Clause (4) of the mentioned Art. stipulates that the offices of the chairpersons in the Panchayats at the village level or any other level should be reserved for the Scheduled Castes, Schedule Tribes. The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution has greatly contributed to the political empowerment of women and marginalized sections of society. There were skeptics who were favourably disposed to the proposition of women leadership. Guided by their traditional dominance in a patriarchal society, the males used to cite some of the disabilities of women like illiteracy, family responsibilities, experience, poverty and communication skills etc. as the inhibiting factors for effective participation of women in the decision-making process at the local level. The upper caste males were frantically in search of methods through which their traditional hold in the rural sector could be retained.

The women from marginalized communities in the rural

areas were not initially very confident of their abilities to assume their leadership in the Panchayats. The male-dominant rural power structure did not like to lose its traditional grip over the rural institutions. This led to the nomination of women members of their families or relatives for the non-SC/ST political seats in the Panchayats. Many of these women who never left their homes had to contest the polls with the support of their husbands. Caste, money and muscle power were also used by the dominant males to ensure their victory in several cases. There were many instances where the elected women in the Panchayats had to depend on their family members to perform their official duties. Most of these women did not know the nuances of the Panchayat administration and they used to depend on their husbands for transaction official business. In many cases husbands or the brothers of elected women presided over the Panchayat meetings and deliberations in absence of the elected women. The elected women in the Panchayats were not so literate, aware, experienced etc. and in many cases they were depending on their male counterparts in decision-making. In regard to the elected Sarpanches and Panches in the village Panchayats they had to depend on their masters who were the traditional power-holders. The officials working at the village level were not reconciled to work under the control of women Sarpanches. With the few exceptions, women members of marginalized communities who are relatively literate and have political ambitions or family history of political participation, volunteered to contest elections in the Panchayats. These women also depend on their own family members and relatives for electioneering. It should be emphasised that there is nothing wrong if the women seek the support of the traditional male leadership as a learning process. The significant achievements of 73rd Amendment Act concerning reservation of seats and political offices in favour of women and the disadvantaged sections of the rural community is that it had improved their awareness, perceptual levels and rightful share in the decision-making exercise. A brief spell of five to eight years is not enough in the history of nation to judge the rationale of political empowerment of women and other weaker sections of society. Social change in the rural India is already perceptible. Thanks to the mass media and the urge among the weaker sections to improve their educational, social and economic status. The influence of electronic media and the improvement in education, income, knowledge and awareness are affecting the value system, attitude expectations and aspirations of the rural disadvantaged sections in recent years. Political improvement holds the key for their social and economic

improvement. There is need to be cynical about the prospects of the Constitutional safeguards provided to the women and weaker sections to ensure their effective participation in the decentralized democratic decision-making process. The disabilities suffered by these deprived sections of society are bound to disappear in the long run. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment could be considered not only the historic but radical for the first time in the history of India. It has made mandatory provisions for the reservations of a minimum number of seats and offices of chairpersons to women as well as to the marginalized sections of the society. All states have introduced these Constitutional imperatives in their respective Panchayat Acts. In the context, many rural women entered the political arena for the time due to persuasion of their family members' caste and political leaders. The male-dominant rural power is not reconciled to their socialisation in politics. This does not deter them from actively participating in the democratic decentralized developmental process at the local level. The male-dominant rural power should desist from applying social pressure on women aspirants who possess the necessary enthusiasm and ability to assume political leadership. The village males should rather encourage and offer support to them. The men folk should develop a positive attitudinal changes and mental make-up in favour of women. The elected rural women and weaker sections should be educated and trained by which they can get the knowledge and understanding. Special training programmes for the elected women members in Panchayats should be organised. The State Institutes of Rural Development and the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) may be required not only to prepare appropriate curriculum for them but also to organise the programmes for them. The training programmes for the elected women members in Panchayats should be organised at state/UT, district and block levels respectively. The teaching methods for these women's should be simpler as possible. Group discussions, success stories and case studies should be the part of training. Electronic media and audio-visual aids should be utilized in the training programmes. State/UT government should introduce incentives for the Panchayats headed by women of marginalized sections of the society for good performance and attendance rather developmental activities taken up. Ultimately the improvements in the literacy among women and weaker sections hold the key factor for their effective participation in decision making process and involvement with the developmental activities in the rural areas.

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Rahul Gandhi's promise of Wealth Redistribution

Following Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's promise of wealth redistribution, fresh discussions are gathering much heat in India. On 21 April 2024, PM Narendra Modi brought up the issue of wealth distribution and stated that the wealth of Indians would be distributed among illegal migrants and those with more children. Wealth redistribution would lead to penury among Indians.

To understand the truth about the evils hidden in the Congress scheme, a look into such experiments is required. In 1950, Sheikh Abdullah, 'Prime Minister' of Jammu & Kashmir enacted a law 'Land to Tiller Law 1950'. This law restricted the ownership of landlords to 22.75 acres and any extra land taken over by the state and given to tillers. The most interesting part was that the tiller had to pay no compensation for the land received which is approximately 1.23 acres per tiller. On paper, this appeared to be social justice of the highest order. But in reality, this was not so. Ladakh was exempted from this law and only Jammu and Kashmir were included. Orchards, fodder land and wasteland were not included in the transfer. Implementation of the law gives credence to the fears of PM Modi regarding the wealth distribution plan of Congress. Kashmir valley had fewer lands and more Muslim landlords than Kashmiri Pandit landlords. Jammu had larger lands and mainly Hindu landlords. Corrupt bureaucracy and loopholes were utilised cynically to subvert social justice. 9000 landlords lost their land to about

1.5 lakh tillers. The landlords were mainly Hindus and the tillers were mainly Muslims. Muslim landlords either showed their lands as orchards, fodder land or barren land with corrupt bureaucracy working in cahoots. Many distributed 22 acres of land each to their family members and thus circumvented the government takeover of extra land. After this legislative exercise, Hindu landlords lost their lands. Their lands were taken away and given to Muslim tillers without any compensation! This brought overnight penury for Hindus who were rendered powerless- both economically and socially by this unjust law, hailed by the media as a shining example of social justice. By 1953, Economic experts, both Indian and foreign had declared this law as not being implemented as perceived. All the land taken without compensation from Hindu landlords was not transferred to tillers. Nearly 1 lakh acres had been vested in the state government. Most of the time, as reported by the media, tillers in the Kashmir region were offered wasteland or given fertile land only after payment of bribes to officials. The powerful people of the village controlled the fertile lands of the landlords. Thus, Hindu landlords were impoverished as their lands were taken away without compensation, the tillers had to pay bribes to officials (the majority were Muslims) and strongmen from villages prospered. By 1953 March, it was an established fact that this social justice experiment had failed on the ground. Sardar Patel was opposed to these reforms while Jawahar Lal Nehru and

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad were in favour of the above laws. Over the years, the Hindus of Jammu Kashmir were weakened by many such laws, some written, some unwritten. Kashmiri Hindus faced an exodus and by 1993, a majority had left the valley. Their lands were lying vacant and were taken over by many Muslims residing in the valley.

In 2001, Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of J&K bought in the 'Roshini act', under which those people squatting on Government land would be given ownership of the land in lieu of a small payment. The majority of land which was thus given away was in the Jammu region, purchased for a pittance by squatters, mainly Muslims. In the valley, a vast portion of such lands were purchased by leaders of NC, PDP and Congress. In Jammu, this land was utilised to settle a large number of Rohingyas. It was reported that land left by Kashmiri Pandits was also given away under the Roshini Act. In 2018 the act was repealed by Satpal Malik, Governor of J&K. On 9 October, 2020, the High Court of Jammu ruled the act as illegal and ordered the return of all properties distributed under the act.

The fears that the wealth distribution scheme of Congress is aimed at taking away hard-earned wealth of Indians and looting it for their own coffers and vote banks is not unfounded. Now that PM Modi has raised this issue in an election rally, all aspects of wealth distribution will come under deep scrutiny. No nation can prosper, nor poverty eliminated, by taking away the wealth of creators and giving it away to others.