

## **Rage, Reconciliation and Security**

*Talk by Mr. B.G Verghese*

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The preamble of the Indian Constitution reads; “We, the people”, the plurality of which acknowledges the various races, religions, castes, languages, tribal communities, gender, regions and vocations that the ‘People’s of India’ belong to. The notion of multiple identities is particularly common in developing societies. Multiple identities are common to India; and, India has always shown the phenomenal ability to accommodate diversity.

However, India is confronted with a problem wherein the nature of diversity and relationships, constantly changes and stretches. This is not a result of the ‘clash of civilizations’ but of evolving and asserting diversities. This is corroborated by India’s history that has brought with it multiple transitions, departures and trajectories at various points in time. The managing of this diversity becomes problematic when the Indian machinery is unable to modify itself to accommodate the changing and growing demands of the people. Unity in diversity is not an objective condition, but an ideal one of an aspirational value.

In 1947, gaining independence, the British ruling elite were replaced by an Indian political elite. The ‘People’ as it were, were disempowered. There was a culture of silence, *akrosh* that prevailed during this time. Today, protest and the assertion of identity and rights are welling up. This process in its entirety will take 30 to 40 more years to complete and move from static to dynamic diversity. Currently, India is a civilization, a State-Nation in the making. Nation building is a ‘work in progress’. Thus, India is confronted with pressures of urbanization, migration, land and water demands and the creation of employment opportunities. Clearly, political and power balances are shifting.

India is also confronted with demographic changes with a current population of 1100 million, and by 2050 it will be about 1600million. One in every six people in the world is an India. Economic development will inevitably lead to skewed development patterns. Instead of coping with its demands on societies, an outlook which is tied up in arguments

of 'sons of the soil', oppressive role of caste courts that impose barbaric punishments and prejudices that allow massive female infanticide are still tolerated.

As early as 1947, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar had warned of the on-set of political freedom without individual freedom. Yet, political democracy was pitted against economic and social democracy; and liberty was pitted against equality and fraternity. These dichotomies prevailed despite the fact that the Indian constitution provides space for simultaneous presence of all these conditions. Such prevalence leads to contradictions in India's social and developmental evolution.

Currently, India faces an up-swell among its masses and people's empowerment is changing social, political and economic dimensions within the country. As a result of which, traditional 'Bharat' is now being perceived by its citizens as, 'India'. This shift contains clash between macro-national integration and micro-world views, mainstream and sub-stream relations and sub-nationalities and subaltern peoples.

An important question confronting the subaltern populace is "when does their history begin?" For instance, the North Eastern tribals migrated into their current areas from other regions. Through time, they were sidelined from important integration processes that would bring them at par with levels of national development and enmeshment. As a result of empowerment of people across the globe, this section of India's population today demands equal national representation. It is in the absence of such representation members of such communities represent ethnic strife against the Indian Union. The 'tea tribes' are a more contemporary example of such an effect. The key to containing such strife is to integrate these sections of the Indian population on the basis of differentiation but not segregation.

Contrary to such a strategy the Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act in the North Eastern Tribal Areas has been violated. The Governors, who have the authority to correct this, have been supine to this violation. There has been alienation of their lands. Original

freedom fighters of such lands, those who fought the colonizers even before the Indian freedom struggle, want partnership in ownership of their lands.

A similar plight has been imposed upon the Dalits who want societal change and lost dignity to be returned. Despite this and constitutional amendments against the caste-system, traditional caste-related practices and social discrimination prevails. There must be an effort to mobilize the Dalits in order to bring about overall development and nationalism in 'rising India'. Similarly the OBC comprise 27% of the Indian population and yet no specific policy exists to stratify and integrate them in national processes. In the absence of this process, there is a race, among societal groups, to 'backwardness' with little or no emphasis given to education in the process of integration.

There has been a tussle between secularism and fraternity in India since partition. The regressive practice of communal politics and minority vote banks are still accepted. Hindutva definitions of cultural parameters in India have dominated socio-cultural aspects in minority communities. This has been represented in personal laws, school text books and the writing of India's history. Thus, there is a constant struggle between notions of Indian nationalism and revivalism among India's diverse sub-cultures. This often results in terrorism, communal riots and rival fundamentalism stemming from India's minority communities. Examples of this can be seen in the Babri Masjid demolition and the Gujarat riots. Politics of accommodation rather than hate should be used to placate the needs of India's subaltern and sub-national communities, thereby integrating them into the national rubric.

Language for instance, can serve the common basis for state formation among India's various sub-communities. Currently there is no affirmative language policy in place and linguistic states are being mismanaged. Personal laws with regard to race, gender discrimination (violence, feticide and property) also have to be appropriately modified to bring about a healthy sense of national integration.

India by its trade and commerce was a globalized nation two centuries ago. The process of globalization was stalled in India due to Western imperialism. The resumption of this process in contemporary times has added to the growing demands of India's population. The nation state must modify its machinery to cater to growing ethnic and social demands; shift from rural to urban living and from a predominantly agrarian to an industrialised economy. The discourse on economic development has however been converted into one of the political dimensions. SEZ has been opposed without regard for facts. 500 approved and advanced-stage-of-processing SEZs, land required is only 0.069% of total land area and 0.12% of agricultural land. This will draw huge investment and employment when annual add to lab force is 11 m and huge investments /FDI and infra and growth required for combat disparities/ poverty. Old arguments no longer fit new situations. And yet, there is a national failure to recognize these changes and a reluctance to weigh anchor and move into uncharted waters.