Analyzing the Contemporary Political Culture of India

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Abstract –Since the political system is embedded in the cultural ethos, every aspect of political culture is bound to have an impact on the working of political culture. The contemporary political culture in India consists of many strands, each with its own psychological problems of adaptation and their typical cultural expressions. Indian democracy is facing a major crisis of political culture even though the formal procedural provisions for elections are being maintained. There are several elements in this crisis ranging from castiesation of politics to the reemergence of nation -state as the hegemonic actor in the public realm at the cost of civil society. The present paper seeks to study the prominent features of Indian political culture and analyze the urgent challenges of contemporary political culture in India.

Keywords- Political Culture, Indian Political culture, Hegemony, Contemporary Challenges, Crisis

Introduction –

The term political culture was first used by Gabriel Almond in "Comparative Political System" which appeared in the Journal of Political System Vol. 18, 1956. Several others like Samuel Beer, Adam Ulams, Sidney Verba, Lucian Pye, Dennis Kavangh, etc., have been responsible for popularising it. Gradually, this term became popular and now it has come to stand as a very important touchstone for a morphological study of the political system.

Culture is the characteristic and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing politics, history, language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. Culture is to be valued to an extent to which it has

discovered the right key of natural harmony of spirit, mind and body. A civilization in pursuit of this aim may be predominantly material like European culture, predominantly mental or intellectual like the Graco -Roman or predominantly spiritual like the culture of India. India's central cultural concept is that of eternal, the spirit encased in matter, evolving the sattvic or the spiritual portion of the mind to an extend that it identifies oneself with pure consciousness. Political culture, in political science, is a set of shared views and normative judgments held by a population regarding its political system. American political scientist Lucian Pye defined political culture as the composite of basic values, feelings, and knowledge that underlie the political process. Hence, the building blocks of political culture are the beliefs, opinions, and emotions of the citizens toward their form of government.(Britanica.com)

India is a diverse land, diversity has been sustained over centuries largely because of the numerous traditions, practices and knowledge systems, which communities across the country have relentlessly nurtured and come to represent in myriad forms. The finest expressions of such traditions and practices are seen portrayed in languages and literature, food habits and cuisine, clothing and dress, fairs and festivals, arts and crafts, music, dance and drama, and architectural and sculptural styles. Besides, the diversity is also seen amplified in the everyday lives of the people. Both these strands, the classical and the folk, from the continuous inter-mingling of peoples and their traditions across regions, giving rise to what we today fondly call the 'Indian Culture' and intermingled with the inalienable political strand, we call it 'Indian Political Culture '. Indian political culture is peculiar as it bears the influence of British cultural legacy and also has an inherited element of rich indigenous cultural legacy.

According to Ashish Nandy, Political culture in India is not merely a reflection of community life-style. It is also the link between historical experiences of politics and model identities, on the one hand and the needs of new political forms, on the other. Defined thus, it becomes not only an emerging national idiom, but also a cultural vector diet that is gradually entering the community's life-style as a legitimate force of social change. (Nandy, A, 2011)

Analysis of the Challenges of Contemporary Political Culture in India –

Country as diverse as ours needs a political culture that is rooted in constitutional values and political discourse based on truth, respect, civility and restraint. Indian democracy is facing a major crisis of political culture even though the formal procedural provisions for elections are being maintained. There are several elements in this crisis like the acrimony in the interactions between the ruling party and the opposition, the growing legitimisation of majoritarianism in a highly diverse society, a loss of confidence in the effectiveness of provisions for the enforcement of fundamental rights and the rule of law, erosion of federalism with the Union government steadily encroaching on the Constitutional rights of states and others (Desai, N ,2021)

Ashish Nandy had warned way back in the eighties that the emerging and the most prominent feature of the Indian political culture in recent years has been the emergence of the nation- state as a hegemonic actor in the public realm. We see a re-emergence of hegemonic state which has made the civil society dormant. The focus of national politics has shifted from the Parliament and the worst victim of this new monologue is democracy itself. The Indian polity has been redefined in which the state has come to dominate, not serve the civil society. 'The most prominent feature of the Indian Political culture in recent years has been the emergence of the nation -state as the hegemonic actor in the public realm. The nation state has been an important actor in the Indian political system during the last four decades but it has shared the stage with a number of political forces. Now, for the first time the nation state has moved centre stage and has hardly any competition from other actors in the public realm. From arbitration in matter of art and literature to the correction of Indian shortcomings in sports, virtually, every sphere of life is now under the jurisdiction of Indian state. (Nandy, A, 2011)

The hegemony of the Indian States and the near absence of other actors, including the civil society is a continuing challenge of Indian political culture till date.

Secondly, Indian polity is in great distress as the political class lacks a strong ideological commitment, resulting in venality, corruption, defection and party hopping as an essential strategy to grab and retain power. Shashi Tharoor has very thoughtfully pointed out towards the propensity of Indian lawmakers to defect at the drop of a hat in search of perks and offices. Consequently, according to Tharoor, the system produces governments focused more on politics and personal aggrandisement rather than policy making and legislation, preoccupied as they are with retaining or capturing power. Unfortunately, this continues to be true even when we are in distress today because of the pandemic. (Tharoor, S,2020)

Moreover, Indian polity is crippled by caste and communal considerations and affects every aspect of the politics from voting, giving tickets to the candidates, to choosing cabinet ministers and is often at the cost and consideration of merit. This is one malaise that is not likely to change or disappear, at least in the near future. The problem lies with the political culture of the country, in which the voters, above all, make their choices based on communal, caste and other primordial considerations and in response to emotional appeals rather than making informed choices about public needs and services.

In their quest of staying glued to political power, the ruling party prioritises party expansionism rather than the country and wasteful expenditures are carried out in every legislative assembly election turning elections into battlefield. There seems to be a near absence of equation between the government and governance making the Indian political situation almost tragic. Misplaced, indeed highly distorted public priorities and the ingrained venality of the political class are the root causes of the malaise in the Indian polity. (Ayoub, M,2020)

Conclusion – Indian political culture is yet caught up in narrow mundane barriers of caste and community with the near absence of the needed equation between the government and the governed. The greatest crisis is wherein the legislative bodies are far likely to transform themselves into genuinely deliberative bodies, shifting their role to deliberations and policy making from concentrating on personal political gains. This political mayhem is likely to continue until the political culture of the country at the popular level and at the level of the political class undergoes a radical transformation.

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