

ANY CHANCE OF A CHANGE?

Change? Where? Of what? In the condition in India after a new government is formed following the recent, biggest general election? The answer is a short 'No'. Why? Because it is just a matter of shuffling and selecting a number of cards out of the defaced, damaged, and discoloured pack of old cards – the same kings, the queens, and the jockeys, or at best their likes.

Politics has polluted everything in the course of some six decades, even after maiming Mother India at the altar of personal gains.

Some people asked Vivekananda, when he came back after conquering the West, if he could do anything for the freedom of India. He said, 'I conquered America even before I went there. I can free India in three days, but where are your men who can keep it going?' Whence came his call, 'Make men first.' Some young people are being brought to the political field, and for the purpose a craze has been created for young people. But it is a long-period plan for the progeny of the professional politicians. It cannot meet the need suggested by Vivekananda. They are not 'first made men', as suggested by Swamiji. Have they built their character, do their hearts feel for the hapless masses? Do their hearts feel the feeble pulsations of the hearts of the millions of the so-called despised brutes? It is the 'pomp of power' that is being implanted in their brains. And they are trotting about and hopelessly trying to implant a picture of a golden dawn in the minds of the rustic folk.

Before the general election the editor of an English daily wrote: 'Young Indians are told they must take their responsibilities sincerely. Why? Because they represent the future. If a candidate happens to be younger than 40 or 45, he or she is projected as a hope for the future. But how many "young" candidates are in the fray because of merit or leadership skills? A vast, indeed overwhelming, majority of them are sons, daughters, nephews and nieces of politicians, in effect the offspring of those responsible for the problem.'

And the same editor said about the politicians: 'What are the conclusions we must draw? First, most politicians are unscrupulous scoundrels. Next, they are opportunistic scoundrels. And finally, they are the kind of scoundrels who are driven neither by principle, nor ideology, but utterly and only by a sense of self-preservation. And there are very very few exceptions.' Everybody knows how renowned politicians have often reviled politicians in the bitterest terms, even saying, it is not the business of gentlemen. We know a Prime Minister of England said so.

The question is, can we face the situation and do something? Yes, we can. We must first have the acumen to distinguish maleficence from munificence, which we have almost lost. In the *Mahābhārata* we find:

*Jānāmi dharmam na cha me pravrittih
Jānāmyadharmam na cha me nivrittih.*

– I know what righteousness is, but I have no predilection for it; I know what unrighteousness is, but know no return from it.

We know these things, but we are not ready to practise them. We are infatuated with an extravagant passion for more and more enjoyment, throwing all power of judgement to the thin air. Because we often forget that we are the only biped animals upon earth, who have

dispensed with four supporting props to keep the body erect. We can look up to the limitless skies and think of the sublime.

Swami Vivekananda defined man in a wonderful expression: 'Man is an infinite circle whose circumference is nowhere'. Also, 'Man can become like God and acquire control over the whole universe.' He said, 'Be a man first, and you will see how the rest will follow of themselves after you.' Swami Vivekananda saw enough of politics in action and observed, 'If you ever saw, my friend, that shocking sight behind the scene of acting of these politicians – the revelry of bribery, that robbery in broad daylight, that dance of the devil in man on such occasions – you will be hopeless about man!'

'Be a man first, my friend, and you will see how the rest will follow of themselves after you.'

What does it mean? Are we not men? We are men in form indeed. For we are not *Homo erectus* only, an animal of human form, who can stand erect on his feet merely. We belong to the species called *Homo sapiens*. *Sapience* means *discernment*, *wisdom*. If we cannot show through our thought, judgement, and action our power of discernment and wisdom, we cannot claim to be *Homo sapiens* or truly men.

We may venture to say that in one sentence of Swami Vivekananda we may attempt to express all of what he taught humankind, and it is this: 'This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.' Are not most of the politicians as almost all of us more dead than alive?

To be proper men we have to take care of three things – our hand, head, and heart (3H's) as suggested by Swami Vivekananda: hand standing for our body, for action, head for discerning and deciding, and heart for feeling – feeling for others, so that we exert our head and hand even in the least possible amelioration of others' woes. For this we have to build our character. It works like a compass, always directing the right way. Character is built through repetition of actions, and actions are guided by ratiocination and will. Will should always be guided by ratiocination and that should place in view the ideal of manhood, which we have talked about already. Human mind is so impressionable and delicate that even a small scratch never gets erased. So with great caution we should handle our mind, of which all the marks we have left will be guiding our life as long as we live.

Certain ideas enter the mind of a person through listening, reading, or experiencing as if with a flash of light and get embedded in the matrix of his mind. The totality of such impressions is what goes to make one's character, because they always prompt the person to decide and act in a situation without a calm judgement before acting or reacting abruptly in a new milieu. Whenever such a flash of light is about to enter our mind we have to judge its merit in giving our mind a mould and allow or reject it then and there, so that our character is not sullied. How many persons are conscious about the process and constantly guard their character from being impaired?

Few amongst the politicians as also of the citizens have heard or think about the immense possibilities of the flowering of a human life. So, alas! How can we expect any real change in the character of a new government or prevent the 'freezing of the genial current of the soul' of the uncared for masses of our motherland?