

Whither, Free India?

After six decades of Independence the urban face of India is barely recognizable. The villages are not as idyllic as they had once been. Remote are the lush green crop fields touching the blue heavens at the horizon. Trees laden with fruits are hardly in the domestic domain. The moon has slipped from the top of bamboo clumps to fall on the parapet of multi-storey buildings. Lanes that lead to your home are now covered with tar; but beware of potholes, else you break your leg. A variety of vegetation in your garden and fish in your pond are mere nostalgia. If you are in the thick of city life, vain is your search for a bit of blue sky. Way of life is perhaps the biggest victim of the vigorous assault by post-independence modernity. After all, we are all free!

‘Man is guided by the stomach.’ We are 1.1 billion, and we must earn money. Automated industries cannot employ many. New methods had to be invented, and we invented them in abundance. Theft, snatching, burglary – these were always there. But now we have so many new avenues: abduction to extort a ransom, murder for almighty cash, share market scam, and many others. To cap them all, bribery pervades all strata, including the highly educated men at high positions. Politics is another lucrative bet. No more does it connote anything for welfare in public life and affair, nor good governance. It stands for breeding and abetting anarchy and corruption galore.

Men have no time to spare for others. One’s own problems and desires, getting more complicated every day, consume all energy. How can we afford the luxury of thinking and feeling for the country? Millions of our people still do not get two square meals a day. ‘Rs 31,585.98 crore worth of wheat and rice meant for the poorest of the poor were siphoned off from the public distribution system in the last three years’, reported a leading national daily. Many do not have access to safe drinking water or sanitation. Many do not get any medical treatment even when in dire need. The burden of credit leads thousands of farmers to suicide. Some village people die as live electric wires snap. We have resolved to bring electricity to all villages by 2012.

We have become very much concerned about power security. So, there has been a preliminary agreement with the US for cooperation on peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We are now sleepless for finalizing it, and anyone against the idea is branded an enemy of the country. Electricity is generated in many ways in our country as well as elsewhere. Nuclear power is just one of them. India already has 17 reactors that account for a very small portion of total generation. Under the agreement we may now, for which many government officials made visits to that country procure 8 new reactors which may add up nuclear power to 7% of total generation, which will not work for power security of the country. The manufacturers of these reactors need clients which they are not getting. So, India must buy them! The fact is: the US government, under pressure from their business lobby, is trying to persuade India to buy them. The price is exorbitant, but no precise information is available for the public in this Republic. If we could use thorium instead of uranium, it could actually ensure power security. Besides deposits in Kerala and the shore areas of whole South India, recently abundant deposits of thorium have been found in Ladakh. There is no declared policy on disposal of the hazardous spent fuel. And they have their Hyde Act to influence Indian defense and foreign policy on nuclear questions. Many in Japan are still suffering from the fallout of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings. Is anybody unaware? We hold elections –

howsoever rigged – to fill the Parliament and Assemblies and form governments, but the much glorified people's representatives cannot discuss a matter of such importance. Once you are in power, you are free to do anything you like. You are even free to annihilate as many of your countrymen as you choose. Because we are a free people and the people have installed you in power.

We are not men, so we do not have self-respect. We look upon the common people as earthly worms. Japan has apologized to China for some wartime crimes. But the Prime Minister of Japan hesitated to ask the US to apologize for dropping two atomic bombs on Japanese soil. For the US is unquestionably the strongest and richest nation. Who will not bow before the strong and the rich?

Swami Vivekananda initially hoped that America would help India rise, but after gaining some experience he realized that such hope was mere moonshine. India must help herself. And she must wait till we become men. After Swamiji's return to India in 1897, some young men asked if he could do something to free India. Swamiji retorted: he could win freedom in a matter of three days, 'but where are the men in this country, who can protect this freedom?'