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## **WELCOME BY DIRECTOR**

### **AIR MARSHAL BN GOKHALE**

Air Marshal BN Gokhale welcomed the dignitaries on the dais and every one present in the auditorium. He said that the Centre has been privileged to hold the Eighth Professor SV Kogekar Memorial Lecture every year since 2008. The first was delivered by Dr. Dileep Padgaonkar on “Indian Democracy: Its Strengths and Weaknesses”, the second by Dr. Madhav Godbole on “Challenges Before the Fifteenth Lok Sabha”, the third by Mr. Wajahat Habibullah on “Right to Information: Reality and Rhetoric”, the fourth by Shri N. Gopalaswami on “Free and Fair Elections : Challenges Ahead”, the fifth by Justice (Dr.) N. Santosh Hegde on “Probity in Public Life: Ethical Issues in Today’s Administration”, the sixth by Shri Kumar Ketkar on “Indian Democracy and Media : Emerging Concerns” , the seventh by Ambassador MK Bhadrakumar, IFS (Retd) on “Relevance of Jawaharlal Nehru’s Foreign Policy in Today’s World”.

Air Marshal BN Gokhale said that Professor SV Kogekar, a graduate of the London School of Economics and student of Harold Laski was the Principal of Fergusson College. A liberal at heart he was deeply committed to the spirit of democracy, forthright in expressing his views. When Indira Gandhi declared Emergency in 1976, he spoke strongly against it and said that it was a violation of the Indian constitution. He would have been happy to learn about today’s subject of the Memorial Lecture.

We are fortunate to have a distinguished person, Dr EAS Sarma to deliver the Memorial Lecture. He did his Master of

Public Administration from Harvard University in 1980 and Ph.D. from Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi in 1986. He had been Principal of Administrative Staff College, Hyderabad, Secretary, Ministry of Finance and Secretary Ministry of Power, Government of India, and Principal Adviser, Planning Commission Delhi. As convener of Civil Society Forum for Better Visakha he has been engaged with activities like promoting. Right to Information, urban planning, sanitation, drinking water, public health, education, environment conservation.

As Chairman of today's Memorial Lecture we have an eminent person, Dr Rajas Parchure, Officiating Director, Gokhale Institute of Politics and Economics. He was Member of Financial Transparency Standards in India, Reserve Bank of India in 2007-2008 and Chairman of the Sub-Group of Risk Management in Agriculture, Twelfth Five year plan, Government of India (2012-2017). He has authored under mentioned books which are to relevant to the subject of today's seminar.

- a) 'The Pure Theory of Value', The Times Research Foundation, Pune, March, 1989.
- b) 'Mergers and Takeovers in India', Co-author N. Ashok Kumar, The Times Research Foundation, Pune, January 1991.
- c) 'The Theory of International Values', Wiley (Eastern) Ltd., October 1994.

**EGHTH PROFESSOR S.V. KOGEKAR  
MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**DR EAS SARMA, FORMER SECRETARY IN  
MINISTRIES OF POWER  
AND FINANCE, GOVT. OF INDIA**

**DEMOCRACY AND INCLUSIVE  
DEVELOPMENT**

I thank the Centre for Advanced Strategic Studies (CASS) for giving me the unique privilege of delivering this year's Prof S V Kogekar Memorial Lecture.

I wish to speak today on *“Democracy and Inclusive Development”*, a subject of considerable importance, discussed and debated widely, but without satisfactory answers in sight. To what extent has the existing paradigm of development benefited the disadvantaged sections in the country and to what extent do our elected bodies represent the true aspirations of the people, are questions that continue to cause us concern.

Before I proceed to deal with this subject, I consider it necessary and relevant to recall the liberal values relentlessly pursued by Prof S V Kogekar throughout his long academic career, starting with his graduation from the Fergusson College and the London School of Economics during the 30s, as the Principal of Fergusson College from 1957 to 1964, as a life member of the Deccan Education Society, as the President of the Indian Political Science Association during 1961, and till his demise at the ripe old age of 93 years in 2007.

**First**, Prof Kogekar had no hesitation in upholding and

fighting for the citizen's fundamental right to express his/ her views fearlessly. During the 50s, when Pune University issued a diktat that its teaching staff should not give speeches or write articles against its policy, Prof Kogekar protested vehemently, wrote against the diktat and, for that reason, had to give up his position on the University's faculty. He felt that the study of politics, like that of other social sciences, "is not a cloistered pursuit; it thrives on a living contact with reality".

Tolerance to dissent is essential for any democracy to be alive. It was Voltaire, the famous French writer and philosopher of the 18th century who said, "*[even if] I do not agree with what you have to say, ... I'll defend to the death your right to say it.*"

**Second**, his passion for upholding the sanctity of the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution was reflected again and again in what he spoke, what he wrote, and what he did, throughout his long professional career. His Kale Memorial Lecture in 1976 against the unfortunate declaration of Emergency brought him face to face with the powers that be, leading to near incarceration. His numerous articles in *Freedom First* on the democratic values embedded in our Constitution speak volumes of his deep commitment to the spirit of democracy.

The Constitution of India is the foundation of our democracy. Its internal checks and balances, in terms of an elected legislature, an independent judiciary, a vibrant civil society and an ever vigilant press, have strengthened it over the decades, rather than weaken it. It was in that context that it became all the more significant that Prof Kogekar had stood up to defend the Constitution against the temporary threat posed by the Emergency.

**Third**, he firmly believed that the makers of the Indian Constitution never intended that political rivalry and

opportunism in a democracy should be allowed to hurt the public interest in any manner. It was this strong belief that prompted him at the Cuttack session of the Indian Political Science Association in 1961 to propose a system of a national government to bring the ruling party and the opposition together to work for the common good of the people.

Prof Kogekar's idea has a great relevance today when the major political parties are indulging in petty bickering, insensitive to the day-to-day concerns of the majority of the people, wasting public money and hurting the public interest. As against the egregious "coalition dharma" that pushed the earlier government into a mire of controversies, a more broad-based political instrumentality is urgently called for, to prompt the political parties to sink their differences and do good to the people.

### **Equity & Swaraj**

The makers of our Constitution were those who fought selflessly for the country's freedom from an oppressive colonial rule. While they successfully fought the foreign rulers, they knew that economic, social, cultural and political inequities that plagued the society posed a far greater threat to the survival of the newly created nation. Accordingly, in framing the Constitution, they addressed those inequalities in great detail and provided exemplary safeguards.

Gandhiji's test of good governance is that the rulers should ask themselves the question, "*Do (our) policies help the poorest and the weakest?*" Deliberately or otherwise, the elders who drafted the Constitution seemed to have pondered over this question again and again, as evident from the final version that was approved on November 26, 1949.

The two singularly important concepts that dominate the Indian Constitution are Gandhiji's idea of "*swaraj*" or self-

governance and Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's concept of "*inclusivity*" in governance in its multifarious dimensions.

Gandhiji's swaraj is not just self-rule but it is also self-restraint. His campaign against colonial rule was not just to liberate the country from the British but also to liberate it from the colonial structures of governance. If Gandhiji's imprint in the Constitution is manifest in the provisions that relate to self-rule and village-level democracy, Dr.Ambedkar's signature is clearly visible in the safeguards provided for the disadvantaged groups. Together, these provisions laid the foundation for a participative, inclusive democracy.

What the Constitution envisioned was not just "economic development" devoid of the human face; it implied a multi-dimensional progress, encompassing human development, institution building, socio-cultural advancement, through affirmative action and participative decision making.

The sovereignty of the people and the equality of opportunity to all sections of the society in terms of employment, incomes and livelihoods are central to the Constitution. The four pillars of governance are **justice**, "social, economic and political", **liberty** of "thought, expression, belief, faith and worship", **equality** of "status and opportunity" and **fraternity** "assuring the dignity of the individual" in furtherance of the unity of the nation.

While the Fundamental Principles in Part III of the Constitution safeguard the individual's rights, the Fundamental Duties in Part IVA stipulate the individual's responsibilities. The Directive Principles in Part IV, though not strictly enforceable by any court, are "*fundamental in the governance of the country and it shall be the duty of the State to apply [those] principles in making laws*".

Among the Directive Principles, Article 38(2) has far reaching implications as it enjoins upon the State to “*strive to minimise the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities in status, facilities and opportunities, not only amongst individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.*”

Article 39, inter alia, requires the State to direct its policy such that “the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to subserve the common good” and that “*the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment*”. Article 46 requires the State to safeguard and promote the interests of the disadvantaged sections. There are several other provisions, elaborately laid down, that require the State to ensure the welfare of the workers in agriculture, industry and other kinds of economic activity.

The Directive Principles require the State to promote self-governance at the village level. Article 40 states that “*the State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government*”.

A unique feature of our Constitution is the concept of affirmative action it provides in favour of the disadvantaged classes and the special protective provisions for the Scheduled Tribes. These provisions clearly bear the signature of Dr. Ambedkar. To millions of the dalits and the disadvantaged, Dr. Ambedkar has become an icon, as the custodian of their rights.

The strength of India’s democracy is the independence and the stature of its judiciary comprising the apex court at the national level, the High Courts in different States and a well



organised subordinate judiciary system at the ground level, with their original and appellate jurisdictions spelt out. The judiciary has played a far reaching role in interpreting the Constitution and laying down rules of good governance within the Constitutional framework.

Over the last few decades, laws have been enacted to transfer regulatory functions of the executive to independent, statutory quasi-judicial bodies in sectors such as electricity, telecommunications, petroleum and so on. To some extent, this has minimised the scope for possible conflict of interest in regulation.

Without free and fair elections, there cannot be a Parliamentary democracy. The Constitution provides an elaborate institutional arrangement for this purpose.

It goes to the credit of our polity and the vibrant nature of our civil society, helped by the constructive role played by the judiciary, that the institutions created by the Constitution have not only withstood the test of time but have also grown from strength to strength.

### **The Constitution And Its Dynamism**

The Indian Constitution and the laws and the regulations made in pursuance of it have evolved over the years, either as a result of suo moto initiatives taken by the Parliament, or as a result of judicial interpretation of its provisions, either on PILs filed by the civil society, or otherwise.

Ironically, it was at a time when the Constitution had come under a severe stress in 1976 during the Emergency, that the then government amended its Preamble to incorporate the two terms of far-reaching importance, “socialist” and “secular”!

In 1992, the 73rd and the 74th amendments to the

Constitution reinforced self-governance at the grass-root level by empowering Gram Sabhas and Panchayats in 6,00,000 villages and Ward Committees and Municipalities in 5,200 urban agglomerations.

Through an interpretation of the Fundamental Rights, the apex court created the concept of “entitlements”, such as the “right to education”, the “right to employment” and the “right to food security”. This has empowered the disadvantaged sections of the society to demand and secure access to such basic amenities as a matter of right, not charity.

### **The Electoral System**

It goes to the credit of the Parliament that, in 1988, the minimum age for voting was reduced from 21 years to 18 years, bringing millions of the youth to join the electorate of the country. During the 2014 elections, out of 815 million eligible voters, those between 18-23 years age were estimated to be 487 million i.e. a proportion of around 60%. In other words, it is the youth, with a different set of values and aspirations, that is going to have a decisive influence on the future of this country.

The apex court has played a crucial role over the years in interpreting the provisions of the Constitution to usher in a series of electoral reforms.

The apex court’s judgements on the ambit of Article 19 have not only enhanced the transparency of the electoral processes for the citizen but also widened the citizen’s voting choices.

The Right to Information Act, which has been an outcome of these judgements, has empowered the citizen to demand and secure information from all public authorities. This has enhanced the executive’s accountability to the public.

Some of apex court's judgements also required the contesting candidates to file sworn affidavits disclosing their financial and criminal antecedents as a precondition to filing nominations. This has made it possible for the electorate to exercise an informed choice while casting their votes.

More recently, the apex court ordered that the candidates' affidavits could be rejected if they contained incomplete information or if they suppressed factual information.

The apex court further held that an elected representative, if convicted to imprisonment of two years or more, would stand automatically disqualified.

Of late, the offer of freebies to voters by political parties has affected the fairness of elections. In that context, the apex court directed the Election Commission to frame guidelines for regulating the promises made in election manifestos.

Earlier, the voter had no option to cast a negative vote against the contesting candidates. The apex court has since come to his/ her rescue by directing the Election Commission to provide a None-Of-The-Above (NOTA) option that could be exercised by the voter.

The Election Commission has also played a proactive role in reforming the electoral system to the extent possible. The Commission has made it mandatory for political parties to get their accounts audited, deposit their funds in recognised banks, not exceed the prescribed limits of expenditure on elections and make a public disclosure of the details of the donations received by them.

When private companies have started routing their donations through "electoral trusts" to hide their identities, the Election Commission has made it mandatory for the trusts

to disclose the sources of their funds.

### **Six Decades of Development**

In aggregate terms, the progress achieved by the nation during the last sixty eight years has been phenomenal.

India's population has more than trebled since Independence. To plan and achieve economic development in the face of a rapidly growing population is not a mean task. Still, during this time span, the average per capita income at constant prices has multiplied by a factor of 5.5. The credit for this should go to the planners who have made it possible.

Starting with a meagre annual production of 51 MMT of food grains at the time of Independence and, dependent heavily on imports, we have been able to step up food grains production by a factor of five and achieve self sufficiency in food. We can also be rightly proud of having one of the largest public distribution systems in the world for delivering food grains at affordable prices to the needy.

As a result of a quantum jump in the public healthcare facilities, the health indicators have improved significantly. For example, Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) has declined by a factor of four and the average level of longevity has doubled.

Similarly, during the last several decades, there has been a steep increase in the number of schools and colleges, leading to a four-fold increase in literacy. In particular, female literacy has increased by a truly impressive factor of seven!

Electricity generation and use are rough indicators of the way the economy has expanded. Over the last several decades since Independence, average per capita electricity consumption has multiplied by a mind boggling factor of 54. Taking the specific examples of industrial production, steel production

has multiplied by a factor of 83, cement by a factor of 93 and oil by a factor of 126.

Thus, in aggregate terms, the progress achieved since Independence has been truly impressive.

### **Development And Its Discontents**

Despite the impressive increase in the average per capita income and the all round economic progress achieved since Independence, large sections of the population remain excluded from the benefits of development. The scourge of extreme poverty continues to plague the economy.

While the experts in the Planning Commission and elsewhere are still quibbling on how to measure poverty, the presence of poverty in India is far too obvious and disconcerting to be missed. While there are millions of households in our villages who have no access to the basic amenities of nutritious food, potable water, shelter, toilets and sanitation, the uglier face of poverty is there to see in the nooks and corners of our cities and towns, in the slums, under the impressive fly-overs, next to construction sites, close to high-rise buildings, on pavements along shining malls and so on. When the Commonwealth Games were held in Delhi in 2010, the government found Delhi's beggars an inconvenient aberration to the city's sheen and splendour. The Delhi administration, like an ostrich hiding its head, shifted thousands of beggars to far off places where they could not be easily seen!

Going by the definition of poverty based on the per capita calorific intake of food, the number of poor in 1973-74 was 321 million. The number did not decline appreciably till 2004-05 and the estimates in 2011-12 showed it to be 269 million! There is a greater concentration of the poor in the erstwhile States of UP, MP and Bihar and in Odisha and Maharashtra, indicating that there are wide regional asymmetries in the

occurrence of poverty.

Poverty manifests itself in several ways, in terms of not only access to nutritious food, but also access to healthcare, shelter, clean water and energy and, more importantly, in terms of political and economic capabilities. If such a multi-dimensional view were to be taken, every third person in the country would be deemed to be “poor” and “deprived”.

No wonder that poverty persists in our country as the benefits of economic growth have not got equitably distributed among the people. The Gini coefficient which measures income inequalities has remained steady over the last several decades. From the statistics available from the Planning Commission, the rural and the urban Gini coefficients for 1973-74 were 0.281 and 0.302 respectively. In 1993-94, a couple of years after the launching of economic reforms, the corresponding Gini coefficients were 0.282 and 0.340. In 2009-10, eighteen years after initiation of the reforms, the rural and the urban Gini coefficients were still 0.276 and 0.371. In other words, income inequities continue to dominate our economy. While these Gini coefficients are averages at the national level, there are intra- and inter-State variations.

One would have expected the successive elected governments to undertake far reaching rural development plans to reduce the rural-urban gaps. The rural-to-urban consumption expenditure ratio, which was already low at 0.63 in 1973-74 remained more or less static over the next two decades but worsened to 0.58 by 2004-05. Displaced by the so-called “development” projects and in search of livelihoods, millions of agricultural workers have migrated to cities, to end up in slums, living in sub-human conditions.

Dedicating Bhakra Nangal project to the nation in 1963, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said, “*this dam has been built with the*

*unrelenting toil of man for the benefit of mankind and therefore is worthy of worship. May you call it a Temple, a Gurudwara or a Mosque, it inspires our admiration and reverence*". More than half a century later, many farmers displaced by that project are yet to get the benefit of rehabilitation or alternate livelihoods! There are thousands of such projects and millions of farming households displaced by them, still awaiting rehabilitation, decades after they were uprooted mercilessly.

Against this sordid background, neither the previous UPA government's move to enact the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act (hereafter referred as new LAACT), nor the NDA government's more recent amendments to it, evoke credibility in the eyes of the farmers that they can secure justice from the government.

The economic growth model, based largely on centralised manufacturing facilities, has ruthlessly displaced millions of people since Independence.

The UN Working Group on Human Rights reported (2012) that, as a result of "development" projects, 60 to 65 million people have got displaced in India since Independence. 40% among them were tribals, another 40% dalits and the remaining, the "other rural poor". The vast majority of them have not been resettled satisfactorily. Once proud owners of agricultural land, their status has since degenerated to that of daily wage workers leading sub-human lives. The rate of human displacement has been very high during the last two decades.

One wonders whether the GDP really implies "*Gross Displacement Product*"!

Are measurements of GDP and national income good

indicators of human development? Analysing the trends across the countries over the last 40 years, UNDP's 2010 Human Development Report has found that the forces driving improvements in health and education are entirely different from those driving improvements in the national income. UNDP concluded that the correlation between economic growth and Human Development Index (income-corrected) is "*remarkably weak and statistically insignificant*"!

There are 23 million families without a pucca shelter, another 29 million live in kutcha houses and 1.77 million live on pavements, or under fly-overs. 65 million live in slums without basic amenities. 53% of the people have no toilets. Every third person has no access to safe drinking water. On the average, a thousand children are dying daily due water borne diseases.

Many households have no access to clean energy even today. 86% of rural households and more than 20% of urban households depend on firewood and animal waste as fuel for cooking, with the attendant risk of toxic pollution leading to carcinogenic and other diseases. Rural women and children spend the best part of their day collecting fuelwood. This is partly responsible for the low children enrollment in schools.

Between 2001 and 2011, the country added 85,000 MW of new capacity. The number of rural households who had no access to electricity in 2001 was 7.5 crores. In 2011, it was 7.8 crores! Similarly, in 2001, the number of urban households who had no access to electricity was 0.6 crores. It increased to 0.7 crores in 2011! Adding electricity generation capacity has not significantly impacted the poor.

Though the average per capita electricity consumption at the national level registered a steep increase over the decades, there are rural-urban and regional inequities. For example,



compared to the more developed western region, the average per capita electricity consumption levels in the southern, the northern, the eastern and the north-eastern regions are lower by a factor of 0.9, 0.7, 0.4 and 0.23 respectively. The average per capita electricity consumption in the urban areas is thrice that in the rural areas. More than one lakh villages in the country are yet to be electrified. There are 23 million households below the poverty line who have no access to electricity.

In 1970-71, small and marginal farmers, constituting 70% of the total number of farmers, cultivated 21% of the agricultural area, with an average holding size of 1.7 acres. One would have expected the much publicised agrarian reform programme undertaken by the planners to result in a more equitable distribution of the land among the farmers. By 2010-11, small and marginal farmers constituted 85% of the total number of farmers, cultivating 45% of the agricultural area, with the average size of their holding declining to 1.5 acres. This does not present a sanguine picture for agriculture, which continues to be the sustaining force for the economy.

Despite the unique provisions in the Constitution for safeguarding the interests of the SCs, STs and other backward classes and despite the major strides taken in the fields of public health, education and income generation, the benefits that have accrued to these disadvantaged sections have remained marginal. Compared to the rest of the society, the gap in literacy in the case of the SCs has been around 10%; in the case of the STs, it has been around 15%. The fact that untouchability still exists and atrocities continue to take place should remind us that economic development has not reduced social exclusion in any significant measure.

There is also a widespread and persistent discrimination against girls starting from early childhood, in matters of basic

nutrition and health care, in areas of economic and political participation, in promotion of literacy and so on. Sixty years after Independence, the nation is still struggling to enact special laws to counter atrocities against women!

### **How Representative Is Our Political System ?**

Despite the Constitutional safeguards that exist, the electoral system in our country has not fully eliminated the disparities in the society in terms of caste, religion, region, gender and so on. In turn, these disparities continue to distort the representative nature of our electoral system. What is more distressing is that the disparities and the distortions seem to be getting more and more accentuated.

During the 2014 elections, 815 million voters cast their votes through a million electronic voting machines and delivered a verdict that even the best psephologists could not predict with accuracy. India's electorate is larger than both the US and EU electorates combined. How fair and representative is the electoral process in India? Has it been able to deliver what the Constituent Assembly had envisioned on November 26, 1949?

Money power and mafia muscle seem to influence our elections. Liquor, real estate and mineral mafias fund political parties and their candidates. Distribution of cash, liquor and freebies to the voters is commonplace.

India ranks below 134 countries, out of 187, in terms of UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI). Out of 161 countries, India's rank is as low as 101 in terms of the Social Progress Index (SPI). On the other hand, the country has the ignominious distinction of being the third largest market for liquor in the world. It is ironic that the successive governments should misuse liquor as a vehicle for generating revenues on the one hand, while the same liquor should be used by the political parties to try and benumb the electorate to secure

votes. Providentially, even liquor has not fully succeeded in reining the giant of a democracy that is slowly waking up from its deep slumber.

The election laws and regulations require the political parties to make a complete disclosure of the funds they received and the expenses they incurred in each election. Unfortunately, what they declared fell woefully short of the funds they actually received and spent. The way extravagant rallies are held and the way the politicians hop around in luxurious aircrafts provided to them by their corporate cohorts make one feel that our netas are more affluent than the bygone royalty.

A recent survey of political parties conducted by a reputed daily showed that the apex decision making bodies of all six national parties in the country are acutely skewed against women, dalits and minorities. No wonder that this inherent asymmetry is reflected in the way elections are contested, in the manner in which the legislative bodies conduct their business and the way the elected governments function.

Going by the disclosures made for the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, the expenditure incurred by the political parties was Rs.1,308 Crores, which worked out to Rs.2.4 Crores per MP. In reality, the figure would be far higher. The bulk of these funds came from private companies through donations permitted under the Companies Act, though some political parties had no compunction in accepting donations even from foreign companies, in violation of the Foreign Contributions (Regulation) Act. When private companies donate to political parties, they expect quid pro quos, which include the ruling party's acquiescence in the companies infringing the laws, polluting the surroundings and violating the human rights of the local communities.

The funds spent on “corporate social responsibility” or CSR

is the fig leaf often used by corporates to cover up the harm inflicted by them on the society. The Companies Act requires them to spend at least two percent of their average profits on CSR. On the other hand, the same Companies Act permits them to spend up to seven and a half percent of their profits towards donations to political parties. One wonders whether there was an invisible hand that inserted these lop-sided provisions in the Companies Act! Though the Constitution required it otherwise, our laws and regulations are biased in favour of the corporates.

The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), an NGO that keeps a close watch on elections, has analysed the background of the candidates who contested the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Its findings are disturbing.

As per the 2011 Census, the average female-to-male ratio in the population is 0.94:1. In view of this, one would have expected the socio-economic progress made during the last six decades to have empowered women so as to reduce the gender disparities. One would have expected this also to increase representation for women in legislative institutions. Going by this logic, the proportion of women in the Lok Sabha ought to have increased to at least 45%, if not more. As against this, only 11.5% of the winning candidates in 2014 elections were women, compared to 11% during 2009. The male dominated legislative bodies have agreed as of now, rather reluctantly, to reserve only 33% of the seats in the legislature for women but the women's reservation Bill has been awaiting Parliament's approval for more than 14 years. The present government at the Centre, with all its good intentions and its adventurism in promulgating ordinances, could have moved this Bill on priority but, in a society dominated by the male, the concept of "equality of status and of opportunity", dreamt by the makers of the Constitution, will take a long time to fructify.

While selecting candidates for contesting elections, the political parties have no hesitation in giving tickets to those even with a criminal background, provided they can splurge money and win.

While 30% of the candidates faced criminal charges during 2009 elections, the proportion had gone up to 34% during the 2014 elections. The corresponding figures for “serious” criminal cases were 15% for 2009 and 21% for 2014. Ten winners in 2014 faced murder charges. ***Statistically, for the 2014 election, the winning probability for candidates with criminal cases was 13%, whereas the winning probability for a clean candidate was only 5%!*** This is truly disturbing.

The financial background of our legislators is no less distressing.

If 58% of the elected members for Lok Sabha in 2009 were crorepatists, 82% were crorepatists among those elected for Lok Sabha in 2014. The average assets of a candidate for the 2009 election were Rs.5.39 crores, whereas the corresponding figure for the 2014 elections was Rs.14.7 Crores. Apparently, the legislature is fast becoming a club for the rich, leaving the rest of India behind!

The corresponding figures for the Union Ministers is no better. 38% of them are facing criminal charges and 17% have serious criminal cases against them. 92% of the Cabinet Ministers are crorepatists and their average assets are Rs.18.48 Crores per Minister. Thus, the political executive itself has become a haven for the rich!

Among the States, that have contributed crorepati Members in a significant number to the recently elected Lok Sabha, figure UP (68 out of 80 MPs), Maharashtra (45 out of 48 MPs) and erstwhile Andhra Pradesh (39 out of 42 MPs).

For a country where every third person has no access to potable water, nutritious food, healthcare, sanitation and shelter, one wonders as to what extent can our legislative bodies represent the concerns of the disadvantaged.

Have the legislative bodies in our country been able to conduct their proceedings with dignity and decorum so as to be able to address the major national concerns such as poverty, lack of sanitation, shelter, toilets and inadequate livelihoods? In the recent years, frequent disruptions amidst mutual fault-finding among political parties have become the order of the day and there is little time available for our legislators to address the issues that concern the poor.

For the citizen, the Constitution has defined the fundamental rights and the fundamental responsibilities in great detail (Article 51A). With regard to the privileges and the responsibilities of the legislators, the makers of the Constitution thought it fit to trust the legislatures to regulate themselves. While the legislators were ever ready to demand and enlarge their privileges frequently, they have not displayed the same eagerness and anxiety in enacting laws to stipulate their responsibilities, as enjoined upon them in Articles 105 and 194.

Article 40 requires the legislature to promote village level self governance. Parts IX and IXA, inserted in 1993 by the 73rd and 74th Amendments, have provided a more significant role for Gram Sabhas and Panchayats in the rural areas and for Ward Committees in municipalities in urban areas. More than two decades have elapsed since then but these grass-root level democratic institutions are yet to get fully empowered. Gram swaraj, as envisioned by Gandhiji has remained an unfulfilled dream.

Instead of progressing towards gram swaraj, we seem to be

moving backwards by abridging that concept in the name of “development”.

The Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act , 1996 (PESA) and the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) mandate “prior consent” of Gram Sabhas for projects located in areas notified under the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution. The LA Act of 2013 requires a “Social Impact Assessment (SIA)” for industrial projects that impact the people’s lives and a “prior consent” of Gram Sabhas as well as the project-affected persons, before projects can be set up.

The successive governments, in the name of hastening “development” projects, have tried to amend these three laws to do away with the “prior consent” requirement altogether. In the case of the LA Act, there are moves to do away with the concept of SIA on the ground that it will cause delays in acquisition of land for industry.

The Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, framed in pursuance of the directive principle on conservation of environment in Article 48A, provides mandatory public consultation as a precondition to assessing the environment impact of a project before it is cleared. For a political executive that is in a tearing hurry to clear industrial projects promoted by its corporate cohorts, such public consultation has become an avoidable irritant that could be reduced to a farce by holding public hearings under police oversight.

During 850-1200 AD, the Chola kings ruled the southern parts of India. Surprisingly, at the local government level during the Chola era, every village was a self-governing unit which not only exercised oversight on village administration but also adjudicated local disputes. In other words, it was a decentralised democracy within a monarchy, whereas, in

independent India, where a new breed of dynasties seem to rule, we have highly centralised monarchies within a democratic system!

There is a growing dichotomy between how “development” is perceived by the ruling political executive and how it is viewed by the communities at the receiving end. Once elected, the political executive seems to feel a sense of discomfiture at facing the people, till the next elections. This raises conceptual issues concerning democracy which I propose to discuss later in some detail.

Anticipating the possible exclusion of girijans from the mainstream of governance, the framers of the Constitution thought it fit to insert a unique provision by way of Clause 5 in the Fifth Schedule, which required the government to review and adapt all laws to suit the girijans’ interests before they are extended to the girijan areas notified under that Schedule. Sixty six years have elapsed since the Constitution came into force, but this safeguard is yet to be put in place. Large tracts of lands are being snatched away from the girijans in the name of development to benefit influential mining companies that fund India’s elections.

Dr. Ambedkar’s dream of safeguarding the rights of the disadvantaged is far from getting fulfilled, despite the specific clauses that exist in the Constitution for that purpose. Consequently, the benefits of economic development that the country has achieved since Independence have not fully reached the disadvantaged sections of the society.

### **Development : A People’s Point Of View**

When Alexander the Great, in one of his generous gestures, prompted the Greek philosopher, Diogenes, who was sunbathing in the agora at that time, to ask for a boon, the latter replied, *“I have nothing to ask but that you would remove to the*



*other side, that you may not, by intercepting the sunshine, take from me what you cannot give”.*

In the northern part of Andhra Pradesh, the government recently announced unilaterally the diversion of 15,000 acres of fertile agricultural land for an international airport. The local villagers, who are proud of agriculture as their main occupation and legacy from their forefathers, resisted the decision in one voice, saying that they valued their agriculture much more than an airport and that they considered that the social costs of an airport far outweighed its benefits. One interesting point they made at that time was that the government had ignored their long pending demand for a modern bus-stand with adequate facilities for the people, rather than an airport that only a few could use!

In another part of the State, a private company offered to buy agricultural land in a village for setting up a sugar factory, for which the company had already approached the government for environment clearance. The villagers felt happy as a sugar factory would bring them wide ranging benefits. Raising sugarcane, for which there was a remunerative support price, would bring all round prosperity for the village. Their underutilized bullock carts could be used to transport the harvested sugarcane to the factory. Both the increased agricultural activity and the factory operations would provide greater employment opportunities for local artisans and unemployed youth, without any special skill upgradation. A bagasse-based co-generation power plant in the factory could generate electricity for the factory. The farmers knew that such a power plant would cause minimal pollution. Thus, the villagers exercised their own due diligence and willingly sold their lands to the developer.

What followed thereafter was disturbing. The developer,

in connivance with the government, altered the proposal overnight and started taking fresh clearances for setting up a coal-based power plant at the same location. The villagers who were aware of the pollution caused by a nearby coal-based power plant and the limited employment opportunities it offered locally, opposed the company's latest proposal in one voice. Initially, the private company, with the connivance of the local officials, had its way. The police registered false cases against the villagers who refused to relent. Finally, the agitating villagers succeeded in stopping the power project! In this case, it was not as though the local people opposed industry for the sake of opposing it. They knew what was good for them. They would prefer an agro-based industry like a sugar factory, not a polluting unit like a power plant.

Outside India, we have the unique story of Enrique Panalosa, an elected Mayor of Bogota, the capital city of Colombia, during 1998-2001. Bogota's population at that time was 7 million, twice that of Pune.

Since the majority of the residents of Bogota were poor, Panalosa's priority as an urban planner was for social integration and equality. He created a 300-km bicycle path network, restricted car use and radically improved pedestrian facilities. He built more than a hundred kilometers of pedestrian-only streets and greenways, a 24 km pedestrian and bicycle-only street that goes through the poorest neighborhoods, and the Juan Amarillo Greenway, a pedestrian street that goes from the richest to the poorest neighborhoods of the capital. He created the TransMilenio bus system which has been a model to many cities and it is now considered the best bus system in the world.

He summed up his approach to urban transport by asking, *"Do we dare create a transport system giving priority to the*

*needs of the poor? Or are we really trying to solve the traffic jams of the upper income people? That is really the true issue that exists”.*

Is not Enrique Panalosa’s model a far cry from the one hundred urban areas that the Central government is going to convert into “smart cities”!

These real life stories illustrate how there can be a totally different perspective on “development”, as perceived by the people who are at its receiving end, compared to how the government usually views it. In the first two cases, the local communities were insistent that they be fully involved in any decision that impinged on their lives. In short, they knew what they needed and they questioned the government or any other external agency imposing projects on them without knowing what they wanted. The benefits and the costs of a project, as perceived by the government located far away from the people, can be totally different from the benefits and costs visible to the local community itself. The relative weights assigned by the local community to different kinds of benefits and costs are different from how they are viewed by an external agency.

The Bogota experience shows how an elected representative, conscious of the need for social integration in a city, invested time and effort on plans to cater to the poor in the slums who constituted a large section of the city’s population, rather than frittering away scarce resources on schemes that satisfied the elite minority. There is an important lesson in it for urban planners in India.

Any activity that abridges the freedoms of the local people cannot strictly qualify to be called “development”. The local communities value their freedoms and they will resist any move to restrict them. Those activities that widen their freedoms are those that become acceptable.

Amartya Sen, in his book, “Development is Freedom”, has rightly described “development’ in these words. *“Development can be seen.....as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy.”*

The core element of “development” is public participation in decision making. The best way to encourage participative decision making is to provide a portfolio of choices to the people, provide them the necessary technical inputs and leave them free to decide on what they perceive as “development”. If the local community is apprehensive of social costs such as loss of agricultural land, or deprivation of livelihoods, or pollution of their surroundings, the well established “precautionary” approach requires the government not to brush aside their objections. Respecting these essential requirements will ensure that the so called development activity undertaken by the government becomes truly inclusive.

The paradigm of inclusive development described above has several implicit advantages.

Participative decision making draws out the best in people, especially their inherent innovative capabilities. Measured in terms of capital invested, this innovation capital, once fully tapped, can far exceed the potential of all the domestic and foreign capital we can ever muster from corporate sources. People’s participation renders decision making transparent, minimises the scope for corruption, reduces costs and enhances the quality of governance.

### **Can “Eminent Domain” Be Benign?**

The term “eminent domain”, first mentioned by the Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius in 1625, referred to the idea that “the sovereign can do anything, if the act of sovereign involves public interest”. It implied the authority of the State, if it so desires, to appropriate private property for a public purpose. This, in

conjunction with an overstretched use of the term, “public purpose” and a lop-sided view of the term, “development”, has played havoc with the lives of millions in India.

The historical background of this is explained below.

The original Land Acquisition Act of 1894 enacted by the colonial rulers, later adopted by independent India in its Constitution, provided a somewhat open-ended definition of the term “public purpose”. It primarily enabled the government to acquire private land on a limited basis, for public hospitals, public schools, railways, roads and other community-oriented projects.

In the Constitution, the individual’s right to property was originally treated as a fundamental right (Article 31).

Later, Nehru’s concept of the “*commanding heights of the public sector*” led to the creation of several PSUs which demanded allocation of large stretches of land, often far in excess of what was needed. In 1979, a Constitutional amendment deleted Article 31 (right to property as a fundamental right) and, instead, introduced Article 300A to empower the government to appropriate the individual’s private property forcibly, merely by paying a “reasonable” compensation. The very fact that the land was meant for the PSU was enough to bring the acquisition within the meaning of a “public purpose”, irrespective of whether the purpose was a commercial one or not. Since all activities of a PSU were deemed to be for “nation building”, they were automatically considered “development” activities. No one really cared to know whether the PSU was engaged in an essential public purpose or a non-essential activity such as running a five-star hotel, or a travel agency, or a shopping mall. Ironically, it was this jugglery of words that the policy makers made use of, unmindful of the trail of human misery that they left behind.

The year 1991 provided a yet another cruel twist to the concept of eminent domain, in conjunction with the distorted meanings assigned to “public purpose” and “development”. While 1991 ostensibly introduced economic liberalisation, in the absence of the three essential requirements of any reform, namely, transparency, competition and public accountability, it was a virulent form of crony capitalism that was unleashed.

“Privatisation” became the mascot of economic liberalisation, overriding the need for transparency and competition. The term “private” itself had a restricted meaning; it denoted only the large, influential corporate agencies, not small enterprise. The successive governments conveniently ignored the fact that a small agriculturist, with little external support, facing the vagaries of the monsoons, or a traditional fisherman, facing the uncertainties of the high seas, take risks comparable, if not more, to the market risks taken by the corporates, and, contributes significantly to nation building. To accommodate one corporate project offering a few hundred skilled jobs, the government has no compunction in disrupting the livelihoods of thousands of these genuine small private entrepreneurs, calling it “development”. Had the government treated these small farmers, fishermen and artisans on an equal footing compared to their corporate allies, the paradigm of development would have followed a different trajectory. Small agro-processing units, modern fish retail outlets, small dairy farms and poultry units, owned by the local communities and their federations, would have placed the economy on a more enduring foundation. None would have got uprooted from their traditional habitats.

Advanced economies like Denmark have strengthened their cooperative institutions to promote agriculture and dairy industry. More than 10% of Denmark’s exports are high-valued products of agriculture and dairy industry.

The corporate industry is primarily interested in grabbing land, minerals and other natural resources, without having to face any competition or independent regulation. Since it is they that fund the politicians, the latter have readily fallen in line. The terms “eminent domain” and “public purpose” have been conveniently hijacked to imply any and every activity undertaken by a private company, whether it is for a genuine public purpose or for amassing profits. The concept of eminent domain has often come in handy for the government to give license to private companies to breach the law of the land and violate the human rights of the people.

Fueled by corporate money power and extreme coercion, the land acquisition process has since become more and more draconian and regressive, provoking widespread public opposition. In some cases, the agitating farmers even lost their lives, resisting State coercion. Such agitations provided fodder for the opposition parties to criticise the party in power, though they would shift their own posture once they returned to power. Land acquisition law has thus become a pawn in the hands of the political parties, none of whom had any sensitivity to the plight of the farmer. The anti-farmer policies of successive governments have already created an agrarian crisis and the increasingly draconian nature of the land acquisition law, primarily meant to help private industry, has become the last straw that broke the camel’s back.

In 2013, the then UPA government initially tried to accommodate the interests of the corporate houses by amending the land acquisition Act in such a way that one could force the farmers to barter away their human rights in exchange for a higher compensation. As a result of intense civil society pressure, the government relented and reluctantly introduced three clauses, one on transparency in acquisition, another mandating prior-consent by the affected families and a third

one on “social impact assessment” of the project as a precondition to land acquisition.

When the NDA came to power, the private industry once again took advantage to get the three clauses rescinded so that they could appropriate agricultural land without any hurdle. The result was a hastily put together Ordinance that once again became a bone of contention between NDA and the opposition. Meanwhile, thousands of farmers continued to commit suicides without any tangible response to their plight from either the Centre or the States.

For development to be inclusive, the decision making process needs to be bottom-to-top. In that approach, it is the people who are fully involved in decision making from the beginning to the end. The government at best would provide technical inputs to enable them to make informed choices. By the very nature of it, it is an empowering exercise for the people, every time they take part in deciding on what they need; a true indicator of democracy at its best. It is they that define what constitutes a public purpose. If they need space for a community school and if a small stretch of land is to be chosen for it, it is they who exercise the choice collectively. If there is no convenient government land available, they may negotiate with one of their own members the terms on which he or she would provide private land for the school or hospital, as the case may be. The local democratic institutions, Gram Sabhas in rural areas and Mohalla Sabhas in urban areas, will play a central role in such decision making. To that extent, it is the people’s “eminent domain” that matters, not the coercive “eminent domain” of the State. In this paradigm of democracy, authority springs from the people at the village level, not transmitted downwards from the top. This process replaces “greed” with “need” and eliminates coercive infringement of individual’s right to property.



In democracies, with centralised decision making systems, punctuated by five-yearly elections, with little scope for the people to have a say in governance during the interregnum, the ruling political executive tends to arrogate to itself a false sense of unsolicited wisdom to be doled out to the people.

On the other hand, in a bottom-to-top decision making system, it is the combined wisdom at the grass-roots level that enlightens the decision making process and imparts legitimacy to it.

This is the direction in which we need to move in order to realise a democracy that is not only representative but also vibrant. If development is to be inclusive, we need to progress in this direction.

### **The Civil Society's Role**

*“As human beings, our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world - that is the myth of the atomic age - as in being able to remake ourselves”.* These are Gandhiji's words. If a positive change is to be brought about in the politics of the country, it should start with each one of us, in our own attitude to politics and our own role within the society. Since politics influence our future, we have a stake in it.

We are often over-conscious of our rights as citizens but not so conscious of our responsibilities. *“Rights accrue automatically to him who duly performs his duties. In fact the right to perform one's duties is the only right that is worth living...It covers all legitimate rights...”* [Gandhiji]

As educated citizens, we seem to be more concerned about our personal comfort than the collective well-being of the society of which we are a part. Several of us belong to an elite minority that lives comfortably at the expense of not only the majority but also at the expense of our own posterity, as we

are overexploiting natural resources that partly belong to the future generations.

*“The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everyone’s greed.”* These are Gandhiji’s prophetic words, which have assumed great relevance in today’s politics, both national and global.

The ancient Greeks had a word for greed; it was *“pleonexia”*, an overreaching desire for more than one’s share.

Nationally and globally, it has become clear that over-exploitation of scarce natural resources like land, water, minerals, forests, the environment and so on has both intra- and inter-generational implications. Unfettered economic growth without considering resource limitations cannot last long. Uneven distribution of the benefits of growth in the short run creates social conflict. Indiscriminate growth in the long run threatens the survival of the society.

The society is today divided into two groups, a pleonetic minority of an elite, who demand more than their legitimate share in the benefits of development and a majority that is silent, having no voice in governance, largely excluded from development. Ironically, this elitist minority comprises not only influential politicians but also large sections of the educated, who find it convenient to perpetuate the paradigm of exclusive development. Either they are blissfully ignorant of the sacrifices expected from the majority to keep the elitist minority comfortable or they pretend that they are unaware of the same.

In his thought provoking book, *“The Price of Inequality”*, Joseph E. Stiglitz, whose work on adverse economic implications of information asymmetries earned him the Nobel award for economic science in 2001, says, *“Paying attention to everyone*

*else's self-interest – in other words to the common welfare – is in fact a precondition for one's own ultimate wellbeing... it isn't just good for the soul; it's good for business.”*

Pleonexia or greed may look attractive in the short run; but it threatens the survival of democracies in the long run. Sooner the educated elite realises this, the better it will be for their own long-term well-being.

In a way, the more participative and equitable a democracy is, the more inclusive and sustainable can be its development. It will therefore be prudent for any society to deepen its democratic processes and reduce inequities for its own long-term survival.

The civil society can play a decisive role in shaping the country's politics to make it more representative and equitable, so that the process of development may become more inclusive and sustainable.

There are a few tangible initiatives we could take as a part of the civil society.

A political party that shuns inner party democracy cannot be trusted to rule the people in a democratic manner. Similarly, a political party that is reluctant to be transparent in its functioning and submit itself to the regime of right to information cannot claim legitimacy in a democratic system. The civil society should extend support only to such parties that commit themselves to transparency and inner party democracy.

The high cost of contesting elections has become a barrier to public-spirited citizens taking part in the electoral process. While extending support to those political parties that adopt austerity in electioneering, the civil society should also

campaign on replacing company donations with State funding in conjunction with a low ceiling on election expenditure incurred by the candidates. We should send a strong signal to all political parties that extravagance in electioneering will give them a negative rating.

Criminalisation of politics has eroded the credibility of our democracy. The civil society should take an unambiguous stand that it will extend support only to such parties that refuse to give tickets to candidates with a criminal background, or those that directly or indirectly own liquor shops, or those that get support from mafias should to ensure that the legislatures provide a balanced representation to women, the civil society should campaign for a gender balance in the selection of candidates and make it known to political parties that women candidates would be preferred.

Election manifestos have lost their credibility as the political parties have short memories and the citizens rarely hold the parties accountable, once they get elected. To some extent, manifestos at the State level or the national level are not quite relevant to the people's problems at the micro-level. Rarely do the citizens belonging to each area, or each section, come together, discuss their immediate problems and demand that they be taken up by the elected representatives. A time has come when the citizens themselves list out their local problems, present them to the contesting candidates and hold the winning candidates accountable for making tangible efforts to address those problems. "Praja manifestos" should override political party manifestos. The civil society should insist that the candidates commit themselves to fulfilling the people's aspirations as listed out in such praja manifestos and remain constantly accountable to the electorate, failing which the voters would be encouraged to reject the unwilling candidates by casting NOTA votes.

During the 2014 elections, the residents of a slum in Visakhapatnam did come up with their own manifesto, demanded that the candidates seeking their votes should not only affix their signatures committing themselves to solving the slum's problems but also agree to report every three months to the slum residents and remain fully accountable. When one candidate refused to fall in line and threatened them, the residents recorded the threats on their mobile telephones, approached the district authorities and succeeded in getting criminal cases filed against the candidates. A praja manifesto is an eminently workable idea.

In order to strengthen the grass-root democratic institutions, the civil society's efforts should be at empowering the Gram Sabhas and Mohalla Sabhas as the foundation of democracy, so that they may have a crucial role in decision making processes on all development activity.

The Aam Admi Party in power in Delhi had recently held its participatory budgeting exercise in eleven constituencies. With the modern communication technology at our disposal, it should be possible to elicit village level participation in both budgeting and planning at the State and Centre levels. With a technology savvy youth that is going to dominate the electorate more and more in the coming years, a real participative democracy is well within the realm of possibility.

Public consultation should be a precondition to any decision that affects the people. On issues of public importance, the civil society needs to campaign in favour of government holding referendums. The people of Raigad district in Maharashtra had forced the State Government to hold a referendum on Maha Mumbai SEZ in September, 2008 and demonstrated that the majority of the farmers were reluctant to part with their fertile lands to a private company. The referendum provided

an impetus to the public agitation against the SEZ which was finally cancelled in 2011.

The civil society can no longer sit back as a silent spectator of the wasteful ways in which the legislative bodies conduct their business. Once elections are held and the elected representatives become a part of the legislative bodies, the electorate has no effective lever to hold them accountable. It is the civil society that can play a crucial role in mobilizing the electorate in such a manner that they can exert sufficient pressure on its representatives to come back to it for consultation on important public policy issues. For legislative bodies to function in an orderly way, they need to enact laws under Articles 105 and 194 to ensure that they can function in a responsible manner. The civil society can exert pressure on the legislators to act on this.

Finally, for the civil society to remain oblivious or indifferent to the concerns of millions of the disadvantaged sections of the society would not only be unethical but also be highly imprudent from the point of view of the long-term survival of the society. The civil society should therefore be committed to the Constitutional safeguards provided for the disadvantaged sections and lend support only to such political parties that work towards fulfilling them.

The scourge of Indian politics today is the mafias that derive strength from liquor and black money. They thrive on keeping the majority of the people illiterate, diffident and intimidated. The civil society should do everything in the realm of possibility to campaign against these evil forces or extend a helping hand to all those who campaign against these mafias.

## **Conclusion**

Writing in *Young India* on May 7, 1931, Gandhiji said, *“there is no human institution but has its dangers. The greater*

*the institution, the greater the chances of abuse. Democracy is a great institution and therefore it is liable to be greatly abused. The remedy, therefore, is not avoidance of democracy but reduction of possibility of abuse to a minimum.”*

The only institution that can resist abuse of democracy is the civil society which comprises each one of us sitting here and all those who are outside, who feel that a positive change is necessary, for a more representative democracy and a more inclusive paradigm of development.

Each one of us should ponder over Gandhiji’s advice, *“be the change that you wish to see in the world.”*

I hope we do not let go this opportunity !

## **CHAIRMAN REMARKS**

### **DR RAJAS PARCHURE**

Shri Sarma has covered a panoramic range of issues and problems that plague the Indian Society, economy and polity today. The founding fathers of India had a very different vision for India. Theirs was a vision of India in which all kinds of extreme inequalities, social, political and economic would be eliminated so that people could be guaranteed justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. Accordingly, these principles were enshrined into the Constitution of India so that they would serve as beacons for future generations of leaders. Even more progressive amendments to the Constitution were to follow. During the Emergency the government added the epithets “socialist” and “secular” to the Indian Republic. In 1992 the Constitution went further and reinforced the idea of “swaraj” by empowering gram sabhas and panchayats and ward committees and municipalities in order to ensure good governance at grass root level. Simultaneously, the Supreme Court interpreted fundamental rights to include the right to education, right to food security and right to employment. The most progressive electoral reforms followed requiring full disclosures from candidates, their funding agencies and election expenditures. The outcomes have been some growth but lack of development.

In the economics literature it is customary to distinguish growth from development. Typically the phenomenon of growth involves increases of quantities of goods and services that society can enjoy. Development, on the other hand, has been defined in terms of reductions and decreases. Thus economic development means reduction / decreases in poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, income inequalities, illiteracy,



pollution, waste, noise, environmental degradation and so on. So while growth means increases in goods development means decreases in bads. Pure development theorists would argue that there are limits to increases in human happiness as consequence of increases in access to economic goods. But really meaningful increases in human happiness are a result of decreases in the bads. Growth produces both goods and bads. Development envisages the elimination of bads.

These or suchlike are the ideas that seem to be playing in Shri Sarma's mind when he points out that real per capita income in India has risen 5.5 times, per capita electricity consumption has increased 54 times, steel production 83 times, cement 93 times and oil production by 126 times, etc. But the accompanying development indicators show a dismal record. There are still 269 million poor, every third person in our society. Income inequality has worsened, rural to urban consumption ratio has worsened, populations in slums are living in subhuman conditions, millions live in kutcha houses, slums or on pavements. 86% of rural households do not have access to clean energy, 78 million people in rural areas have no access to electricity. Marginalization of farmers has taken place – 85% of farmers are small and marginal and cultivate 45% of agricultural area with average farm size of 1.5 acres.

How can this happen inspite of the progressive constitutional reforms taking place? This is the paradox! Shri Sarma finds the explanation for this paradox in the fact that our democracy has ceased to be representative. Apex decision making bodies of all six national parties are acutely skewed against women, dalits and minorities. Huge funds are required for elections – 82% of elected representatives in Lok Sabha are crorepatris and average assets of a candidates are Rs. 14.7 crores. 38% of Union Ministers are facing criminal charges. All elected MP's have access to corporate funds, some have access also to

foreign funding. Only 11% of winning candidates in Lok Sabha are women. “We have highly centralized monarchies within a democratic system”, he notes – in short, our democracy has become a haven for the elite and the rich who cannot be relied upon to reach development to the people.

What is the alternative? Shri Sarma argues quoting Amartya Sen that “Development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy”. His message is “Empower People and Decentralize Decision making to the public”. Leave it to local communities to decide what they want and how they want to fulfill it. The foundations of democracy lie in the gram sabhas and the mohalla sabhas. Civil society members must strive towards multilevel governance.

Does he see any silver lining in the otherwise dark cloud? Shri Sarma does not mention it. Being an incurable optimist I do. The massive mandate that people of India have given to BJP-NDA who have pitched for decentralized governance, smaller federal units and panchayati raj seems to me to be in just the direction that Shri Sarma is indicating. Further the unprecedentedly large transfer of resources from the Union to the State Governments (of the order of over 60% of tax revenues) in the recent Finance Commission’s award seems to me proof that the ideas are being reflected in deeds. Finally, the first few steps towards comprehensive social security for Indians in the form of accident and life insurance and pensions under the Jan Dhan initiative could be a harbinger of better days to come.