CONSTANT DISRUPTIONS IN PARLIAMENT FAIL THE MANDATE OF THE PEOPLE

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Everyone knows that parliamentary democracy is a system of government in which citizens elect their representatives to a Parliament. Parliament then engages to make the laws and take appropriate decisions for the country. The making of parliamentary democracy ought to reflect the will of the people. But the will of the people does not stop merely at electing their representatives and "constituting" the parliament. The people also desire to see the members of Parliament discussing the issues dominating the everyday life of "we the people of India".

Democracy, particularly parliamentary democracy, has to be seen as a cultural praxis, through which the everyday experience of the people and social groups, including those on the margins, should find their voices being heard in Parliament. This, too, should not be limited to occasional events. People must hear the reverberations of their voices often and for longer, from Parliament. Let us take a leaf out of the Buddha's life. He once asked Ananda, his first disciple, "Have you heard, Ananda, that the Vajjians had full and frequent public assemblies?". Ananda replied: "Lord, so I have heard", the Blessed one rejoined: "So long as the Vajjians hold these full and frequent assemblies, so long may they be expected not to decline but to prosper". Hiren Mukerjee, a veteran parliamentarian, had narrated this exchange in the context of talking about Indian Parliament in the days of the first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. Thus, the will of the people has to be seen in the great Vajjian tradition.

Parliamentary democracy is an ecosystem wherein "one man, one vote, one value" should be seen in terms of the priorities of Parliament. No matter how powerful a majority is available with the treasury benches, the party in power should learn not to compel upon itself a top-down approach of policy making, nor a "my way or the high way" manner of strategy in passing legislations. In the interests of a healthy Parliament, the Opposition too must review its ontological being in Parliament and be ready to constantly review an all-season recipe of opposition just for the sake of opposing. In recent years, it has been observed that the members of Parliament in the treasury and opposition benches prefer not to speak to each other and take great trouble to speak at each other. Parliamentary democracy can get us the best results only when authorities are willing to look for common agreeable propositions.

The roots of this "war-vocabulary", employed by both the sides in contemporary Parliament, could be traced through the developments during 2012-13 of the UPA-2 government. During this period, continued disruptions and subsequent adjournments ruined the very idea of a civic discourse. Opposition leaders of the said period went on to repeatedly highlight that causing "disruption" in the house is a valid parliamentary strategy. The political climate of those years was being shaped on a daily basis by the protests on the metropolitan streets on issues ranging from violence against women to corruption at high places. Sensing the mood, the then Opposition probably thought it was better to speak to the audience outside rather than discuss within. However, history has a strange habit of repeating itself. So, in the last few months of the present government, we are witnessing a repeat of the 2012-13 period. Opposition parties in the

present Parliament prefer the same "valid strategy" of disruption to embarrass the government. Thus, whether it is Rafale, agrarian distress or unemployment, opposition parties are relying on the same strategy: Speak to the larger audience outside than engage with the limited audience inside. However, the very idea of parliamentary democracy suffers in the process. Parliamentary democracy gets richer only if nuanced debates are held. A false consciousness which emanates out of the "influencers" on social media makes the leaders shun the idea of deliberations within the House, and instead, keep engaging with talking-shops outside Parliament.

All of us should remember Edmund Burke's words. "When the leaders choose to make themselves bidders at an auction of popularity, their talents, in the construction of the state, will be of no service. They will become flatterers instead of legislators; the instruments, not the guides, of the people," he said. One wonders if it's for this reason that governments largely fail to rally the resources existing within Parliament in order to respond effectively to contemporary challenges. The compulsion to flatter a powerful elite is bound to impact parliamentary procedures, and, undermine the dignity and rights of marginalised groups and communities. It can be argued that the agrarian crisis, lack of jobs, labour and the unorganised sector could be better tackled if the parliamentarians who conduct research on these issues were allowed to contribute to deliberations in both the Houses — similar to the energies they invest in literary festivals, media conclaves and other such events.

The people are not the only ones to incur losses in this carefully-crafted ruckus in the well of Parliament. The new parliamentarians are socialised into parliamentary procedures and norms of behaviour by the older members, definitely in the Rajya Sabha but also in the Lok Sabha. As a new member of Parliament, I feel this loss keenly as I research records and accounts of deliberations by MPs both inside and outside Parliament, because surely what one witnesses in the House is not what ought to be.

This article first appeared in the January 12, 2019, print edition under the title 'Noise without conversation'

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