



THE TIMES OF INDIA

*Date: 12-08-20*

## How Tech is Shaping Education

*Technology can offer more flexibility and learning support than traditional formats*

**PK Mishra ,[ The writer is Additional Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister ]**



As I virtually addressed the Foundation Day programme of IIT-Jodhpur on the ‘Role of Technology in Shaping Education: the Future Vistas’, the topic for the day, in my view, was in sync with the way we were interacting. Coincidentally, the programme was organised using a technology platform, without all of us travelling to Jodhpur which would have meant more time, travels and other aspects of logistics.

Over the last few years, during my address at various convocations, I would often speak a few words on how technology was changing the way we live and work, and how “game changer” ideas such as smartphone revolution, artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), robotics, blockchain

technologies and Internet of Things would usher changes at a much faster pace than ever before. But, I never expected that the situation would be transformed so dramatically, so quickly. Role of technology has become predominant and its impact will be felt much more comprehensively in the field of education.

Tech enabled learning can not only bring in transformational change in online education experience, it can also enhance and supplement regular classroom based pedagogy. It could offer more flexibility and learning support than the traditional formats. Technology offers teachers the opportunity to become more collaborative and extend learning beyond classrooms. Educators could create learning communities comprising students, fellow educators and experts in various disciplines around the world.

Across the country, the Government of India is encouraging several e-learning projects under the National Mission on Education through ICT initiatives such as Swayam, Swayam-Prabha, National Digital Library, e-Yantra, Virtual Lab, that are helping students as well as teachers in upskilling as well as providing them quality resources. In addition, these efforts are leading to creation of knowledge tools which encourage creativity and innovation, particularly among young students. The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was announced only last week. It replaces the earlier policy introduced 34 years ago, and envisages major reforms in the education system. It focusses a great deal on technology use and integration. NEP recognises that India is a global leader in information and communication tech and other cutting edge domains, such as space. The Digital India campaign is helping to transform the entire

nation into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. While education will play a critical role in this transformation, technology itself will play an important role in the improvement of educational processes and outcomes; thus, the relationship between technology and education is bi-directional.

It is proposed to set up an autonomous body, the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF) to provide a platform for free exchange of ideas and use of technology to enhance learning, assessment, planning, administration and so on both for school and higher education. The government will also set up the National Research Foundation (NRF), to initiate and expand research efforts in technology. NRF will play an important role in advancing core AI research, developing and deploying application-based research and advancing international research efforts to address global challenges.

The Covid-19 crisis has resulted in a tectonic shift in our education system. Major universities and higher education institutions have partially or fully shifted to online mode of teaching and are reporting considerable success in their endeavours. Further, availability of world-class tech platforms have enabled them to smoothly transition to online delivery mode.

Our understanding of Covid-19 continues to evolve. The need of social distancing will continue to affect traditional learning processes. A “new normal” in education might emerge which will possibly have a lasting influence on pedagogy and assessment. Online education also has challenges. Conducting remotely proctored exams is perhaps the most important challenge. Replacing exams by project or take-home challenges can provide some viable and cost effective alternatives.

For conducting laboratory classes and hands-on exercises for remote students, there may be a need to design and deploy a toolbox of online, virtual and remote labs that can be used in different courses to bridge this gap. Another limitation is lack, or absence of, human touch. Blended learning, using a mix of online and on-campus resources could be an option.

In a multilingual country like ours, language barriers create complexities. Cutting edge research in text translation and machine learning aims to create deep-learning systems that can translate English lectures into a student’s native language. Similar technologies in voice recognition and text summarisation can transcribe an entire lecture and reduce paragraphs of text into relevant bullet points. Capacity building of teachers will be crucial to the success of use of technology in education.

I recently read, in a report by the World Economic Forum, that over a century ago, at the time of the Spanish Flu when people were isolating themselves, many (mostly Americans) turned to telephone to get in touch with friends and family. The Spanish Flu underscored how essential the technology of telecom was to modern society. Possibly we are at a similar inflection point in time today.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given a clarion call for Atmanirbhar Bharat. It goes much beyond being a self-reliant nation; it envisages India’s leading role in the global arena as a leader in technology and global supply chain of goods and services. At the same time, it is also a social change paradigm where every individual is encouraged to strive for excellence in what she does. In this context, the role of education and higher educational institutions is extremely important. They pave the way for achieving excellence and realising national potential.

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# THE ECONOMIC TIMES

*Date: 12-08-20*

## Real Estate Needs Some Special Care

### ET Editorials

Real estate is a huge employer and the visible symbol of urbanisation. It has extensive forward and backward linkages in the economy. The sector is in dire straits and the restructuring on offer for much of industry will bypass it, unless its specific conditions are addressed.

Very little of real estate gets funded by banks or the larger housing finance companies or other non-banking financial companies. Very little of the troubled industry would register as standard, in the lingo of creditworthiness, as of March 1, 2020, a pre-requisite for the loan restructuring that RBI has announced for industry, for which a committee headed by veteran banker K V Kamath is developing norms. So, the government and RBI must come up with some sector-specific solutions, to release the Rs 11 lakh crore and then some locked up in stalled real estate projects. A first step would be to separate the projects that would become standard with some bit of capital infusion, so that they can leverage the credit system to complete their projects and go forward. These would mostly be projects where 70% or more of the construction is complete. The Rs 25,000 crore fund announced by the government almost a year ago has not disbursed much money because of the stringent eligibility conditions it put forward. Relax those conditions and allow these projects to utilise those funds and get going. Then there are projects where construction is complete in the range 30-70%. Capital that does not require immediate servicing is what such projects call for. That means creating formal corporate structures that can issue equity, diluting the promoters' stakes, to a special purpose vehicle sponsored directly or indirectly by the government. And the last category, of projects that turned unviable early on, should be bought out at a realistic valuation.

Real estate bodies Credai and Naredco should work with rating agencies to identify projects that carry little risk. The special vehicle can issue bonds blessed by the Credit Guarantee Enhancement Corporation to finance its capital provision to such projects.



*Date: 12-08-20*

## Mending Fences with Neighbors

*Delhi doesn't just have a China problem .In six years, India's ties with other South Asian countries have frayed, providing China with an opening*

**Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, [ Chowdhury is leader of the Congress in Lok Sabha and chairperson, Public Accounts Committee]**



So, did China transgress into our territory? The Ministry of Defence first tells us it did, puts it on record with specific dates and details, then pulls the information down from its website the next day. Either the MoD got the facts wrong or was told to pull it down, especially after the prime minister told an all-party meeting that no one had either come in or is on Indian territory. As we wait for an explanation that may never come, one thing is clear: There is confusion in our diplomacy with China,

which remains determined to push its boundaries.

We are caught in what strategic experts call the “Thucydides Trap” — the condition that war is likely if a new power feels threatened by the rise of another. That term, from ancient Greece for the tension between Athens and Sparta, as enunciated by Thucydides, is commonly used for US-China relations but can be easily transposed to India versus China.

For, there is a disconnect between what Beijing says and what it does. It kept calling the situation “stable and controllable” as 20 of our soldiers were martyred. Our PM and defence minister visited Ladakh and addressed the nation from there but we haven’t heard one word from Chinese President Xi Jinping. He has left it to his Foreign office spokespersons to respond.

Diplomacy with Beijing, as many countries have realised, is as credible as dry water or wooden iron. So it won’t be a surprise if the Chinese withdrawal from Galwan and other points of friction is accompanied by permanent occupation in Depsang and Pangong Tso.

Therein lies the crux of the problem — it is about much more than China. China isn’t interested in nibbling away some land along the Line of Actual Control, it wants its footprints in the entire region.

It’s more than an accident of geography that India shares her borders with all other South Asian nations. No other South Asian countries, except Afghanistan and Pakistan, share a border with any other South Asian nation.

This is our asset and the value of this asset is determined by our neighbours and our investment in the relationship with them. In May 2014, amid pomp and grandeur, hype and hoopla, newly-elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the heads of all the SAARC countries for his swearing-in ceremony. Look where we are now, merely six years down the road. That sense of camaraderie has evaporated. What was presented as a strong signal of regional solidarity is faint and flickering.

China is an overwhelming presence in each of our neighbouring countries. When the prime minister warned against expansionism, the irony wasn’t lost on many — China’s expansionism in the region is directly proportional to the deterioration of our relationship with our neighbours. Our neighbours,

including Nepal, are all young emerging democracies developing new institutions but they find a growing appeal in the authoritarian paradigm of Beijing than India's democratic one.

It was the late Indira Gandhi who said: "The nations of our region can prosper only by treating one another as sovereign equals." She said that friendship does not mean identical views but a basic framework of respect based on equality and trust in which there is sympathy for each other's difficulties. This was behind former Prime Minister I K Gujral's doctrine, too, in which India made unilateral concessions to neighbouring countries with regard to trade and travel without expecting reciprocal treatment. Over decades, even by cleaving through the wall of our adversities, we have been accumulating trust and goodwill among our neighbours. That is now being frittered away.

Almost all our neighbours now nurse grudges.

Never in our contemporary history has Nepal gone down such an acrimonious path. With our only neighbouring Hindu country, the spiritual link is frayed over a dispute related to 400 sq km of Indian territory at Kala Pani. So much so that Nepal is even asking for a review of the 1947 agreement on Gurkhas.

The flashpoint came on May 8, the day the 80-km road was inaugurated by the defence minister. But the New Delhi-Kathmandu chill set in since the blockade of 2015, when China saw an opportunity and rushed in. Since May 8, we have seen a sudden upsurge of hostility with Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli openly adversarial; Nepal border guards firing upon Indian residents; Kathmandu staying away from the multilateral BIMSTEC counterterrorism exercise; refusing to accept the US-sponsored Millennium Challenge Cooperation Grant which was supposed to upgrade Nepal's electricity transmission system and connect it to the Indian power grid. We all know that the Chinese envoy in Kathmandu is proactive, intervening to resolve the internal bickering of the ruling Communist party to bring stability.

Take Bangladesh, a country that called the bluff of Jinnah's two-nation theory, its war of liberation fought by both Hindus and Muslims for a distinct cultural and linguistic identity. That revolution, led by Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman, had the full support of the Indian people. I know what that history means, I am an MP from Murshidabad. My district has 71 lakh people, 66 per cent of whom are Muslims and 33 per cent Hindus. In absolute terms, it has the largest Muslim concentration in the country. I insisted and was successful in persuading my colleague Pranab Mukherjee to contest the Lok Sabha election from my district. Pranab da was dithering but the people overwhelmingly voted for him in the 2004 general election and he won. It is a fact that despite fervent calls by M A Jinnah, the Muslim population of the district never desired to move to Pakistan and no communal riots occurred here during Partition.

This same Muslim population is now fearful of the new citizenship law, the NRC and the NPR — this trinity puts their existence at stake, that is the refrain. Where do they go if they can't pass the test? This concern reverberates in Bangladesh. No less a person than the Union Home Minister said that illegal migrants will be picked up like termites and thrown away. Where? India has assured Bangladesh that the NRC is an internal issue but the tone of domestic politics — where Bangladeshi Muslims are painted as arch enemies eroding India — have set off deep disquiet in Dhaka.

We should not forget that since 2009, when Sheikh Hasina assumed power in Bangladesh, she has waged a zero-tolerance campaign against terrorist outfits inimical to India. Bangladesh is burdened with more than 10 lakh Rohingya refugees and yet there is simmering discontent about its relations with India. The

foreign minister of Bangladesh cancelled his visit. PM Modi was invited to the inaugural ceremony of “Mujib Borso” (Mujibur Rahman’s centennial birth anniversary) but that was cancelled in the wake of the corona pandemic. The purported visit was vehemently opposed by various organisations in Bangladesh, much to the discomfiture of India. Certainly, these aren’t good signs and there is a fear that China is waiting to rush in.

We need to explore innovative long-term efficacious and durable initiatives to mend fences in the neighbourhood and provide them with the comfort to look beyond the sphere of Chinese influence.

Some of the low-hanging fruit that can be plucked: BBIN (Bangla, Bhutan, India, Nepal) signed a motor vehicles agreement which should be speedily implemented; the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway needs a renewed push; medical tourism, education, arts and culture — the entire thrust of soft power — can be used to generate and renew connections between the aspirational youth of all the countries.

From Indira Gandhi to Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Manmohan Singh, all prime ministers have stressed that the more stable and cordial our relationship with our neighbours, the more sustained will be our progress. At a time when the pandemic has forced us to retreat behind walls, we need to look back and take lessons from history so that we can forge a more peaceful future for the young generation in not only our country but the entire region.



*Date: 12-08-20*

## **The future of Indian secularism**

***It is premature to pronounce the end of constitutional secularism; it has only suffered a setback and can be revived***

**Rajeev Bhargava is Professor, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi**

Our public discourse is resounding with triumphalism on the one hand, and lament on the other over the death or defeat of secularism. It seems as if the bhoomi puja has burnt its bodily remains, and if anyone cares to claim it, the ashes of secularism will be buried near a dargah or immersed in the Saryu. As a child of the republic founded in 1950, one part of me wishes to join the lament. But the other part, nudging me to contemplate this moment, asks: does anything in India ever die? Silenced, yes; forced temporarily to go underground, maybe; transmigrate to another bodily form under a different name, possibly. But death? Gone forever? No!

Three years ago, on August 6, 2017, I had written, in this very paper — in the article, “Constitutional or party-political secularism?” — that secularism has paid a heavy price in our country for being at the centre of public and political discourse. It has been persistently misused and abused. Distinguishing it from constitutional political secularism, I called this abused entity, ‘party-political secularism’.

## Respect and critique

Constitutional secularism is marked by at least two features. First, critical respect for all religions. Unlike some secularisms, ours is not blindly anti-religious but respects religion. Unlike the secularisms of predominantly single religious societies, it respects not one but all religions. However, given the virtual impossibility of distinguishing the religious from the social, as B.R. Ambedkar famously observed, every aspect of religious doctrine or practice cannot be respected. Respect for religion must be accompanied by critique.

It follows that our state must respectfully leave religion alone but also intervene whenever religious groups promote communal disharmony and discrimination on grounds of religion (an inter-religious matter) or are unable to protect their own members from the oppressions they perpetuate (an intra-religious issue). Therefore, and this is its second feature, the Indian state abandons strict separation but keeps a principled distance from all religions. For instance, it cannot tolerate untouchability or leave all personal laws as they are. Equally, it may non-preferentially subsidise schools run by religious communities. Thus, it has to constantly decide when to engage or disengage, help or hinder religion depending entirely on which of these enhances our constitutional commitment to freedom, equality and fraternity. This constitutional secularism cannot be sustained by governments alone but requires collective commitment from an impartial judiciary, a scrupulous media, civil society activists, and an alert citizenry.

## Advent of opportunism

Party-political secularism, born around 40 years ago, is a nefarious doctrine practised by all political parties, including by so-called 'secular forces'. This secularism has dispelled all values from the core idea and replaced them with opportunism. Opportunistic distance (engagement or disengagement), but mainly opportunistic alliance with religious communities, particularly for the sake of immediate electoral benefit, is its unspoken slogan. Indifferent to freedom and equality-based religious reform, it has removed critical from the term 'critical respect' and bizarrely interpreted 'respect' to mean cutting deals with aggressive or orthodox sections of religious groups — unlocking the Babri Masjid/Ram temple for puja, and forsaking women's rights in the Shah Bano case. It has even been complicit in igniting communal violence. This party-political 'secular' state, cozying up alternately to the fanatical fringe of the minority and the majority, was readymade for takeover by a majoritarian party. This was accomplished by removing the word 'all' and replacing it by 'majority': respect only the majority religion; never criticise it, but recklessly demonise others; and ridding the state of the corrupt practice of opportunistic distance not by restoring principled distance but magically abolishing distance altogether. This is untrammelled majoritarianism masquerading as secularism, one that opposes 'pseudo-secularism' without examining its own equally unethical practices.

Today, Indian constitutional secularism is swallowed up by this party-political secularism, with not a little help from the Opposition, media and judiciary. Yet, I hesitate to pronounce the death of constitutional secularism. Grounded in millennia-old pluralist traditions, it cannot easily be brushed aside. Instead, I prefer the word 'setback'. Brakes have been suddenly applied to this largely state-driven political project of dealing with inter-religious issues such as communal harmony. It has come to a screeching halt, broken down. Does secularism then have a future?

## Two crucial moves

I suggest two crucial moves to kick-start the discourse and practice of secularism. First, a shift of focus from a politically-led project to a socially-driven movement for justice. Second, a shift of emphasis from inter-religious to intra-religious issues. I invoke the name of two great leaders, B.R. Ambedkar and Jawaharlal Nehru, to make my point. B.R. Ambedkar dispassionately observed that when two roughly equal communities view each other as enemies, they get trapped in a majority-minority syndrome, a vicious cycle of spiralling political conflict and social alienation. This was true in the 1930s and the 1940s. Today, feeling extremely vulnerable, Indian Muslims appear to have opted out of this syndrome. When this happens, the syndrome implodes. The result is neither open conflict nor harmony, simply an exiled existence for Muslims in their own homeland.

B.R. Ambedkar also claimed that when communities view each other as a menace, they tend to close ranks. This has another debilitating impact: all dissent within the community is muzzled and much needed internal reforms are stalled. If so, the collapse of the syndrome unintentionally throws up an opportunity. As the focus shifts from the other to oneself, it may allow deeper introspection within, multiple dissenting voices to resurface, create conditions to root out intra-religious injustices, and make its members free and equal. After all, the Indian project of secularism has been thwarted as much by party-politics as by religious orthodoxy and dogma.

### **Europe's example**

Here, Europe's example helps. The fight against the oppression of the church was as much a popular struggle as it was driven by the state. Europe's secularism provided a principle to fight intra-religious oppressions. Nehru understood this. For him, secularism was not only a project of civic friendship among religious communities but also of opposition to religion-based caste and gender oppressions — an endeavour at the heart of our own socially-driven freedom and equality-oriented reform movements in the 19th century. For the moment, the state-driven political project of secularism and its legal constitutional form appear to have taken a hit. But precisely this 'setback' can be turned into an opportunity to revitalise the social project of secularism. Since the Indian state has failed to support victims of oppressions sanctioned by religion, a peaceful and democratic secularism from below provides a vantage point from which to carry out a much-needed internal critique and reform of our own respective religions, to enable their compatibility with constitutional values of equality, liberty and justice. A collective push from young men and women untainted by the politics and ideological straitjacketing of the recent past may help strengthen the social struggle of emancipation from intra-religious injustices. Those who most benefit from upholding these constitutional values, the oppressed minorities, Dalits, women, citizens sick to death with zealotry or crass commercialisation of their faiths must together renew this project.

### **Inter-community relations**

I am not suggesting that we must hereby ignore inter-religious issues. But having itself produced disharmony, it is surely beyond the capacity of the current state to restore communal harmony. But distance, freedom from mutual obsession, give communities breathing space. Each can now explore resources within to construct new ways of living together. The issue here is not simple retrieval of older, failed modes of religious toleration. The political project of secularism arose precisely because religious toleration no longer worked. Needed today are new forms of socio-religious reciprocity, crucial for the business of everyday life and novel ways of reducing the political alienation of citizens, a democratic deficit whose ramifications go beyond the ambit of secularism.



If a critique of religion is to come at least partly from within, then its idiom must also draw from local religiosities and the multiple languages in which they find expression. A critique purely from outside, one which is not partly immanent, will not work. Nor can popular-democratic struggles be taken over by middle-class vanguardism. However, such struggles too need support from intellectuals. But to be effective, these intellectuals should already have learnt from a wide variety of cultural traditions, both natal and those outside their immediate ambit. Only then will their voice carry weight, and be heard.

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*Date: 12-08-20*

## **India's population data and a tale of two projections**

***The country's demographic future will see peaking and then declining numbers driven by a sharp fertility reduction***

**Sonalde Desai is Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland and Professor and Centre Director, NCAER National Data Innovation Centre.**

A new study (<https://bit.ly/30JzoKd>), published in the highly regarded journal, The Lancet, and prepared by the Seattle-based Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), has shaken up the world of population policy. It argues that while India is destined to be the largest country in the world, its population will peak by mid-century. And as the 21st century closes, its ultimate population will be far smaller than anyone could have anticipated, about 1.09 billion instead of approximately 1.35 billion today. It could even be as low as 724 million.

Readers who follow COVID-19 projections will remember that in March 2020, the IHME projected U.S. deaths from COVID-19 to be around 81,000 by August. Deaths in the U.S. today are more than twice that number. The underlying assumptions for the initial model were not borne out. The IHME population projections are also subject to underlying assumptions that deserve careful scrutiny. They predict that by the year 2100, on average, Indian women will have 1.29 children. Since each woman must have two children to replace herself and her husband, this will result in a sharp population decline. Contrast this predicted fertility rate of 1.29 for India with the projected cohort fertility of 1.53 for the United States and 1.78 for France in the same model. It is difficult to believe that Indian parents could be less committed to childbearing than American or French parents.

Until 2050, the IHME projections are almost identical to widely-used United Nations projections. The UN (<https://bit.ly/2PGYALh>) projects that India's population will be 1.64 billion by 2050, the IHME projects 1.61 billion by 2048. It is only in the second half of the century that the two projections diverge with the UN predicting a population of 1.45 billion by 2100, and the IHME, 1.09 billion.

Part of this divergence may come from IHME model's excessive reliance on data regarding current contraceptive use in the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) and potential for increasing contraceptive use. Research at the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) National Data Innovation Centre by Santanu Pramanik and colleagues shows that contraceptive use in the NFHS is poorly estimated, and as a result, unmet need for contraception may be lower than that estimated by the IHME model, generating implausibly low fertility projections for 2100.

## **Fertility decline**

Regardless of whether we subscribe to the UN's projections, or the IHME projections, India's demographic future contains a peaking and subsequently declining population driven by a sharp reduction in fertility. In the 1950s, India's Total fertility rate (TFR) was nearly six children per woman; today it is 2.2. Ironically, the massive push for family planning coupled with forced sterilisation during the Emergency barely led to a 17% decline in TFR from 5.9 in 1960 to 4.9 in 1980. However, between 1992 and 2015, it had fallen by 35% from 3.4 to 2.2.

What happened to accelerate fertility decline to a level where 18 States and Union Territories have a TFR below 2, the replacement level? One might attribute it to the success of the family planning programme but family planning has long lost its primacy in the Indian policy discourse. Between 1975 and 1994, family planning workers had targets they were expected to meet regarding sterilisations, condom distribution and intrauterine device (IUD) insertion. Often these targets led to explicit or implicit coercion. Following the Cairo conference on Population and Development in 1994, these targets were abandoned.

If carrots have been dropped, the stick of policies designed to punish people with large families has been largely ineffective. Punitive policies include denial of maternity leave for third and subsequent births, limiting benefits of maternity schemes and ineligibility to contest in local body elections for individuals with large families. However, as Nirmala Buch, former Chief Secretary of Madhya Pradesh, wrote, these policies were mostly ignored in practice.

## **Aspirational revolution**

If public policies to encourage the small family norm or to provide contraception have been lackadaisical, what led couples to abandon the ideal of large families? It seems highly probable that the socioeconomic transformation of India since the 1990s has played an important role. Over this period, agriculture became an increasingly smaller part of the Indian economy, school and college enrolment grew sharply and individuals lucky enough to find a job in government, multinationals or software services companies reaped tremendous financial benefits. Not surprisingly, parents began to rethink their family-building strategies. Where farmers used to see more workers when they saw their children, the new aspirational parents see enrolment in coaching classes as a ticket to success.

The literature on fertility decline in western countries attributes the decline in fertility to retreat from the family; Indian parents seem to demonstrate increased rather than decreased commitment to family by reducing the number of children and investing more in each child. My research with demographer Alaka Basu at Cornell University compares families of different size at the same income level and finds that small and large families do not differ in their leisure activities, women's participation in the workforce or how many material goods they purchase. However, smaller families invest more money in their children by sending them to private schools and coaching classes. It is not aspirations for self but that for children that seems to drive fertility decline.

## **In language of the past**

Ironically, even in the face of this sharp fertility decline among all segments of Indian society, the public discourse is still rooted in the language of the 1970s and on supposedly high fertility rate, particularly in some areas such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar or among some groups such as women with low levels of

education or Muslims. This periodically results in politicians proposing remedies that would force these ostensibly ignorant or uncaring parents to have fewer children.

Demographic data suggest that the aspirational revolution is already under way. What we need to hasten the fertility decline is to ensure that the health and family welfare system is up to this challenge and provides contraception and sexual and reproductive health services that allow individuals to have only as many children as they want.



## दैनिक जागरण

Date: 12-08-20

### राजनीति में सुधार का अधूरा एजेंडा

गुरु प्रकाश , ( लेखक पटना विश्वविद्यालय में असिस्टेंट प्रोफेसर एवं इंडिया फाउंडेशन में फेलो हैं )

आगामी स्वतंत्रता दिवस के साथ ही वह समय और करीब आ जाएगा जब भारत अपनी स्वतंत्रता के 75 वर्ष पूरे करेगा। स्वाभाविक रूप से ऐसे अवसर इसकी गहन समीक्षा के लिए उपयुक्त समय होते हैं कि भारत ने क्या अर्जित किया? स्वतंत्रता के समय ब्रिटेन के पूर्व प्रधानमंत्री विंस्टन चर्चिल समेत कई विदेशी नेताओं ने भारत के भविष्य को लेकर संदेह प्रकट किया था। उन्होंने मुख्य रूप से यह सवाल उठाया था कि दक्षिण एशिया के मध्य में स्थित भौगोलिक रूप से इस विशाल और सामाजिक एवं सांस्कृतिक रूप से विविधतापूर्ण राष्ट्र में वेस्टमिंस्टर मॉडल वाले लोकतंत्र का क्या हश्र होगा? ऐसे प्रश्न आजादी के बाद तक के कालखंड में भी उठाए गए, लेकिन उन सभी संदेहों और शंकाओं को ध्वस्त करते हुए आज न सिर्फ हमारा लोकतंत्र सुरक्षित है, बल्कि समाज के विभिन्न वर्गों को साथ लेकर लगातार आगे बढ़ रहा है और फल-फूल रहा है। बीते सात दशकों से अधिक समय की यात्रा में लोकतंत्र एवं उसके विभिन्न संस्थान और भी मजबूत बनकर उभरे हैं। दुनिया का सबसे पुराना लोकतंत्र कहे जाने वाले अमेरिका के साथ तुलना करें तो जहां अमेरिका में अभी तक कोई महिला राष्ट्राध्यक्ष नहीं बन पाई वहीं भारत ने शुरुआती दशकों में ही इंदिरा गांधी का उदय देखा। जहां अमेरिका में एक अफ्रीकी मूल के व्यक्ति को व्हाइट हाउस पहुंचने में ढाई सौ वर्ष से अधिक समय लग गया वहीं भारत में बाबू जगजीवन राम और रामनाथ कोविंद समेत ऐसे अनेक लोगों के उदाहरण सामने हैं जिन्होंने समाज के सबसे निचले पायदान से सत्ता के सर्वोच्च स्थान तक की सफल यात्रा की है।

यदि आपातकाल के काले अध्याय, जब संविधान को ताक पर रख दिया गया था, को छोड़ दें तो संविधान को हर सरकार ने सर्वोच्च माना है। उन्होंने उसी के अनुसार अपनी नीतियों को आगे बढ़ाया है। वास्तव में आज के सॉफ्ट पावर डिप्लोमेसी युग में लोकतंत्र हमारी यूएसपी है। विविधता इसका सौंदर्य और सामाजिक न्याय एक प्रतिबद्धता है। इसे बनाए रखने के लिए राजनीति में सुधार आवश्यक हैं। वर्तमान में कोरोना के अलावा हमारी राजनीति तीन खतरनाक वायरसों-परिवार, कारोबार और शृंगार यानी ठाठ-बाट से ग्रस्त हो गई है। इसकी काट ढूँढना अब आवश्यक हो गया है। आज नहीं तो कल कोरोना वायरस की वैक्सीन तो हमारे वैज्ञानिक निकाल ही लेंगे, लेकिन राजनीति में व्याप्त इन तीनों वायरसों का समाधान करना भी हमारी प्राथमिकता होनी चाहिए। यह काम समाज में एक मुक्त विमर्श से ही संभव होगा।

यदि हम अपने लोकतंत्र की चिरकालीन समृद्धि चाहते हैं तो परिवार, कारोबार और शृंगार रूपी इन वायरसों से हमें अपनी राजनीति को हर हाल में मुक्त करना होगा। इस दिशा में आज एक सकारात्मक और संवेदनशील संवाद की जरूरत महसूस हो रही है।

भारतीय राजनीति में परिवारवाद को नेहरू-गांधी परिवार ने संस्थागत किया। इसमें कोई दोराय नहीं कि सिर्फ नेहरू की पुत्री होने के कारण इंदिरा गांधी को केंद्र में मंत्री बनाया गया। निश्चित रूप से ऐसा नहीं है कि सिर्फ एक परिवार में जन्म लेने के कारण आप राजनीति में आने के लिए अयोग्य हो जाते हैं, लेकिन सत्ता की संरचना में इस प्रकार से पिछले दरवाजे से प्रवेश पर चर्चा तो होनी ही चाहिए। क्यों न राजनीतिक दल आपस में एक ऐसी सहमति बनाएं जिसमें एक समय में एक परिवार से एक ही पीढ़ी सत्ता या संगठन की राजनीति करे? यदि पिता संगठन में है तो पुत्र या पुत्री सदन की राजनीति करे। इससे बाकी लोगों को भी अवसर प्राप्त हो। अभी यह अवसर कम होता जा रहा है। भाजपा में अभी ऐसी व्यवस्था नजर आती है। अन्य राजनीतिक दलों को भी ऐसी संरचना बनानी चाहिए। भाजपा में जहां पार्टी को परिवार माना गया है वहीं बहुत सारे ऐसे दल भी हैं जहां परिवार ही पार्टी है। आखिर इस पर एक मुक्त राजनीतिक विमर्श क्यों नहीं होना चाहिए कि कई राजनीतिक दलों का स्वरूप पार्टी ही परिवार वाला क्यों है? दुख की बात है कि लोगों ने जमात से विमर्श प्रारंभ किया, जाति पर ठहरे और परिवार पर आकर रुक गए। परिवार की राजनीति करने वालों को याद रखना चाहिए कि इतिहास अपने मूल्यांकन में निष्ठुर रहता है। समाज के नाम पर सिर्फ और सिर्फ अपने परिवार को सत्ता के करीब रखने वालों को इतिहास अपने अध्यायों में याद रखेगा और बार-बार एक न्यायपूर्ण व्यवस्था की याद दिलाता रहेगा।

आज भी लोग दीनदयाल उपाध्याय, कर्पूरी ठाकुर और भोला पासवान शास्त्री जैसे नेताओं की सादगी को याद करते हैं। अब तो लगता है कि राजनीति में सादगी का दौर ही एक तरह से समाप्त हो रहा है। एक समय सादगी ही राजनेताओं का शृंगार हुआ करती थी, किंतु दुख की बात है कि आज बड़ी गाड़ियां, बड़े बंगले और सुरक्षाकर्मियों की फौज से नेताओं को आनंद आने लगा है। यहां अटल बिहारी वाजपेयी जी का स्मरण आता है। कई अवसरों पर उन्होंने जमीन पर भी सोने में गुरेज नहीं किया। कर्पूरी ठाकुर के बारे में कहा जाता है कि मुख्यमंत्री होने के बावजूद उनकी धर्मपत्नी सरकारी आवास में न रहकर गांव में ही रहती थीं। यशवंत सिन्हा ने अपनी पुस्तक में लिखा है कि एक बार वह कर्पूरी जी के गांव स्थित आवास पर गए और वहां की सादगीपूर्ण व्यवस्था को देखकर अचंभित हो गए। आज जरूरत है कि राजनीति को पेशा या व्यवसाय नहीं, बल्कि त्याग के दृष्टिकोण से समझा जाए। हार्वर्ड और केंब्रिज जैसे विश्वविद्यालयों से पढ़कर आप आंकड़ों की भाषा तो समझ जाएंगे, लेकिन कतार के अंत में खड़े व्यक्ति की आंखों की भाषा को समझने के लिए सामाजिक संवेदना और जमीनी अनुभव की आवश्यकता होती है। इस आवश्यकता की पूर्ति तभी होगी जब हमारी राजनीति परिवार, कारोबार और शृंगार से मुक्त होगी।

## भारत डोगरा

दुनिया और देश दोनों के स्तर पर यह चिंता बढ़ रही है कि बाढ़ और भू-स्खलन से बचाव पर अपार धनराशि खर्च करने के बाद भी इन दोनों आपदाओं से होने वाली तबाही बढ़ रही है। बाढ़ नियंत्रण उपायों में आखिर ऐसी क्या कमी है, जिसके कारण यह संकटपूर्ण स्थिति उत्पन्न हुई है, इस सवाल का जवाब खोजना जरूरी है, ताकि हम बेहतर, अधिक सफलता की संभावना वाली नीतियों की ओर बढ़ सकें। यह चिंतन इस कारण और भी आवश्यक हो गया है, क्योंकि हम जलवायु बदलाव के दौर में पहुंच चुके हैं और इस दौर में कम समय में अधिक वर्षा केंद्रित होने की संभावना व्यक्त की गई है। दूसरे शब्दों में, हमें बाढ़ के संकट का अधिक सामना करने के लिए पहले से भी और तैयार रहने की जरूरत है।

बाढ़ के खतरे की संभावना वाले किसी भी क्षेत्र के लोगों को सबसे पहला बचाव का उपाय प्रायः यही नजर आता है कि उनके क्षेत्र को नदी से बचाने के लिए एक दीवार या तटबंध बना दिया जाए। इसका आसपास के अन्य इलाकों पर क्या असर होगा, या दस-बीस वर्ष बाद उनके अपने गांव या बस्ती पर क्या असर होगा, प्रायः इस बारे में अधिक विचार उस समय नहीं किया जाता है। इसी तरह एक अधिक व्यापक क्षेत्र को बाढ़ से बचाने का सवाल आता है, तो प्रायः यह कहा जाता है कि नदी के ऊपर के क्षेत्र में बांध बना कर वहां अतिरिक्त पानी रोक दिया जाए। पर इस प्रक्रिया में जो अनेक पेचीदगियां व समस्याएं हैं, उन पर उस समय अधिक सोचा नहीं जाता। बाद में इन निर्माण कार्यों से अनेक समस्याएं उत्पन्न होती हैं तो एक बार फिर किसी कामचलाऊ उपाय के बारे में सोचा जाता है। यदि इस तरह से कार्य करने के स्थान पर एक अधिक समग्र व दीर्घकालीन, समुदाय-आधारित सोच से काम किया जाए, तो बाढ़ नियंत्रण में सफलता की संभावना बढ़ सकती है।

बाढ़ नियंत्रण उपाय के रूप में तटबंधों की अपनी कुछ सीमाएं हैं। दूसरे निर्माण कार्य और रख-रखाव में लापरवाही और भ्रष्टाचार के कारण हमने इनसे जुड़ी समस्याओं को और भी बहुत बढ़ा दिया है। तटबंध द्वारा नदियों को बांधने की एक सीमा तो यह है कि जहां कुछ बस्तियों को बाढ़ से सुरक्षा मिलती है, वहां कुछ अन्य बस्तियों के लिए बाढ़ का संकट बढ़ने की संभावना भी पैदा हो जाती है। अधिक गाद लाने वाली नदियों को तटबंध से बांधने में एक समस्या यह भी है कि नदियों के उठते स्तर के साथ तटबंध को भी निरंतर ऊंचा करना पड़ता है। जो बस्तियां तटबंध और नदी के बीच फंस कर रह जाती हैं, उनकी दुर्गति के बारे में जितना कहा जाए कम है। ऐसे लोगों के पुनर्वास के संतोषजनक प्रयास बहुत कम हुए हैं।

इतना ही नहीं, तटबंधों द्वारा जिन बस्तियों को सुरक्षा देने का वायदा किया जाता है, उनमें भी बाढ़ की समस्या बढ़ सकती है। यदि वर्षा जल के नदी में मिलने का मार्ग अवरुद्ध कर दिया जाए और तटबंध में इस पानी के नदी तक पहुंचने की पर्याप्त व्यवस्था न हो, तो दलदली और बाढ़ की एक नई समस्या उत्पन्न हो सकती है। यदि नियंत्रित निकासी के लिए जो कार्य करना था, उसकी जगह छोड़ दी गई है और सरकारी ढर्रे के चलते उस काम को पूरा नहीं किया गया, तो भी यहां से बाढ़ का पानी बहुत वेग से आ सकता है। तटबंध द्वारा 'सुरक्षित' की गई आबादी के लिए सबसे कठिन स्थिति तो तब उत्पन्न होती है, जब निर्माण कार्य या रख-रखाव उचित न होने के कारण तटबंध टूट जाते हैं और अचानक बहुत-सा पानी उनकी बस्तियों में प्रवेश कर जाता है। इस तरह जो बाढ़ आती है, वह नदियों के धीरे-धीरे उठते जल-स्तर से कहीं अधिक विनाशकारी होती है।

बांध निर्माण से कितनी बाढ़ सुरक्षा हो रही है, इस बारे में भी कुछ सवाल उठाए जाने जरूरी हैं। बांध प्रायः सिंचाई और पनबिजली उत्पादन के लिए बनाए जाते हैं, पर साथ ही उनसे बाढ़ नियंत्रण का महत्वपूर्ण लाभ प्राप्त होगा, यह भी कहा जाता है। यह लाभ तभी प्राप्त हो सकता है जब अधिक वर्षा के समय बांध के जलाशय में पर्याप्त जल रोका जा सके और बाद में उसे धीरे-धीरे नियंत्रित ढंग से छोड़ा जा सके। लेकिन पहाड़ों में जो वन-विनाश और भू-कटाव हुआ है, उससे जलाशयों में भारी मात्रा में मिट्टी-गाद भर गई है और जल रोकने की क्षमता कम हो गई है। इसी कारण तेज वर्षा के दिनों में पानी भी बहुत अधिक होता है, क्योंकि वर्षा के बहते जल का वेग कम करने वाले पेड़ कट चुके हैं। बांध के संचालन में सिंचाई और पनबिजली के लिए जलाशय को अधिक भरने का दबाव होता है। दूसरी ओर वर्षा के दिनों में बाढ़ से बचाव के लिए जरूरी होता है कि जलाशय को कुछ खाली रखा जाए। दूसरे शब्दों में बांध के जलाशय का उपयोग यदि बाढ़ बचाव के लिए करना है, तो पनबिजली के उपयोग को कुछ कम करना होगा। जब ऐसा नहीं होता है तो जलाशय में बाढ़ के पानी को रोकने की क्षमता नहीं रहती है। ऐसी स्थिति में बहुत सा पानी वेग से एक साथ छोड़ना पड़ता है जो भयंकर विनाश उत्पन्न कर सकता है। और भी कई कारणों से बाढ़ से होने वाली क्षति बढ़ी है। जैसे, जल निकासी के रास्तों को अवरुद्ध करते हुए नई बस्तियां बसाना (विशेषकर शहरी क्षेत्रों में व शहरीकृत हो रहे क्षेत्रों में), सड़कों, नहरों और रेल मार्गों के निर्माण के समय निकासी की पर्याप्त व्यवस्था न करना, संसाधनों के अभाव या दुरुपयोग के कारण वर्षा से पहले नालों की सफाई जैसे जरूरी कार्य न करना आदि।

भू-स्खलन की भी यही स्थिति है कि इससे बचाव पर हो रहे खर्च के बावजूद यह आपदा बढ़ रही है। विज्ञान पत्रिका 'ज्योलोजी' ने हाल में उपलब्ध जानकारी व आंकड़ों के आधार पर दावा किया है कि विश्व में भू-स्खलन के कारण होने वाली मौतों की संख्या वास्तव में पहले के अनुमानों की अपेक्षा दस गुना अधिक हो चुकी है। अधिक भू-स्खलन वाले क्षेत्रों में भारत के अनेक पर्वतीय क्षेत्र भी बताए गए हैं। इस ओर विशेष ध्यान देना जरूरी है कि पर्वतीय क्षेत्रों में किन मानवीय कारणों व गलतियों से भू-स्खलन की घटनाएं और इनसे होने वाली क्षति बढ़ी है। एक बड़ी वजह तो यह है कि विभिन्न निर्माण कार्यों (विशेषकर बांध निर्माण) और खनन के लिए पर्वतीय क्षेत्रों में विस्फोटकों का अंधाधुंध उपयोग किया गया है। इस कारण भू-स्खलन का खतरा बढ़ गया है। इसके अलावा वन-विनाश भी भू-स्खलन के खतरे को बढ़ाने का बड़ा कारण बना है। भू-स्खलन अपने आप में तो बड़ी आपदा है ही, साथ में यह बाढ़ को और उग्र करता है। यदि हिमालय में किसी नदी का बहाव भू-स्खलन के मलबे के कारण रुक जाता है, तो इससे कृत्रिम अस्थायी झील बनने लगती है और जब पानी का वेग अधिक होने से जब यह झील फूटती है, तो बहुत प्रलयकारी बाढ़ आ सकती है।

यदि स्थानीय समुदायों की भागीदारी से बाढ़ व भू-स्खलन के विभिन्न पक्षों की सही समझ बनाई जाए और इन आपदाओं को कम करने के लिए बहुपक्षीय उपाय किए जाएं, जिनमें अल्पकालीन के साथ दीर्घकालीन जरूरतों को भी ध्यान में रखा जाए, तो बाढ़ व भू-स्खलन नियंत्रण से कहीं बेहतर सफलता प्राप्त हो सकती है। इसके लिए एक समग्र दृष्टिकोण बहुत जरूरी है। सरकारी स्तर पर भी विभागीय कार्यों के बंटवारे से ऊपर उठ कर समग्र सोच अपनानी होगी।