

नई दुनिया

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नए विचारों का अमृत

डॉ. विजय अग्रवाल, (लेखक पूर्व प्रशासनिक अधिकारी हैं)



“विचारैही मन्युगष्याणाम” उपनिषद् के इस वाक्य का अर्थ है कि विचार ही मनुष्य है। या यूँ कह लीजिए कि विचार ही मनुष्य का निर्माण करते हैं। क्या हम उपनिषद् के इस महान एवं सार्वकालिक वाक्य का उपयोग राष्ट्र के संदर्भ में करते हुए कह सकते हैं कि “विचारैही राष्ट्रानाम”। राजनीति विज्ञान में किसी भी राष्ट्र के लिए एक निश्चित भौगोलिक सीमा, जनसंख्या एवं सम्प्राभुता नामक तीन तत्वों को सर्वोपरि एवं अनिवार्य बताया गया है। लेकिन जब हम भारत नामक विस्तृत राष्ट्र के स्वरूप पर इस परिभाषा को लागू करते हैं, तो यह परिभाषा तंग पड़ने लगती है। अब, जबकि हम ब्रिटिश भारत एवं 560 से भी अधिक अलग-अलग रियासतों को मिलाकर बनाये गये वर्तमान भारत के एक राष्ट्र के बारे में विचार करते हैं, तो हमें यह सोचना चाहिए कि आखिर यह विलक्षण कार्य सम्पन्न कैसे हो पाया है ? पूरे यूरोप का एक ही धर्म है - ईसाइयत। मात्र 75 करोड़ की आबादी वाले इस भौगोलिक क्षेत्र में 44 राष्ट्र हैं। जबकि 140 करोड़

आबादी वाले विश्व के सभी धर्मों से युक्त विभिन्न संस्कृतियों और वह भी सदियों से चले आ रहे इतिहास के ऊँचे-नीचे दौर के बाद भी भारत पूरे विश्व के सामने सिर ताने हुए एक ही राष्ट्र के रूप में खड़ा है। तो यह चमत्कार कैसे हो सका ? विश्वा एवं भारत के इतिहास का एक विद्यार्थी तथा दुनिया के सभी महाद्वीपों के 40 देशों की यात्रा करने के बाद जो उत्तर मुझे मिला है वह है-भारत का अपना दर्शनशास्त्र। वैदिक काल से ही भारत जिस ‘वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्’ के आदर्श को लेकर चला, उसे न केवल हमारे चौथे-पाँचवें ईस्वी पूर्व के दार्शनिकों, 15वीं 16वीं शताब्दी के भक्तिकालीन संतों और 19वीं शताब्दी के पुनर्जागरण काल के समाज सुधारकों एवं विचारकों ने ही आगे, बढ़ाया बल्कि स्वतंत्रता आंदोलन के दौरान विभिन्न राजनेताओं एवं संगठनों के माध्यम से भी यह विचार भिन्न-भिन्न रूपों में अभिव्यक्त होकर जनचेतना में समाता रहा है। इसलिए इस बात पर पूरी गहनता के साथ विचार किया जाना चाहिए कि किस प्रकार राजाराम मोहन राय, दयानन्द सरस्वती तथा विवेकानन्द जैसे विचारकों ने एक ऐसी दार्शनिक नींव रखी, जिस पर आगे चलकर हमारे स्वतंत्रता आन्दोलन की इमारत बन सकी, और अंततः उस पर तिरंगा फहरा सका। भारतीय स्वातंत्रता आन्दोलन इस मायने में विश्व की अन्यन क्रांतियों से एवं आंदोलनों से; चाहे फ्रांस की 1779 की ही क्रांति क्यों न हो, भिन्न है कि यहाँ राजनैतिक आन्दोलन से पहले एक वैचारिक आन्दोलन चला। इसके बाद ये दोनों आन्दोलन समानान्तर रूप से एक-दूसरे से गुथे हुए एक-दूसरे को ताकत देते हुए आगे बढ़कर अंततः 15 अगस्त 1947 तक पहुँचे।

स्वतंत्रता आन्दोलन के अगुवा महात्मा गांधी जब यह कहते हैं कि “मैं चाहता हूँ कि मेरे घर की सारी खिड़कियां खुली रहे, ताकि उससे चारों ओर की हवाएं आ सकें, “तो जाहिर है कि वे अपने लगभग साढ़े तीन हजार साल पुराने ऋग्वेद के

“आनो भद्राः कृतवो यंतु विश्व तः” की ही बात कर रहे थे। युवाओं के सामने जब विवेकानन्दे खड़े होकर ओजस्वीस वक्तीव्य देते हैं, तो उनके वे वक्तकव्य ऐसे मालूम पड़ने हैं, मानो कि गीता के कृष्ण अर्जुन से कह रहे हों, “उत्तिष्ठ” यानी कि उठो। सन 1893 के शिकागो के विश्वम धर्म सम्मेलन में विवेकानन्द का “भाइयों और बहनों” का उदबोधन ‘वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्’ की ही मूल भारतीय चेतना से उत्पन्न ध्वनि थी, जिसे हम आज “वैक्सी न डिप्लोमेसी” के रूप में देख रहे हैं। उस समय उन्होंने ने भारतीय धर्म को विचारों का जो महासागर बताया था, उसे ही मूलतः वर्तमान में प्रधानमंत्री नरेन्द्र मोदी ने “विचारों का अमृत” कहा है। अमृत मूलतः एक रसायन है, जिसे तुलसीदास ने “राम रसायन तुम्हरे पास” कहा है। यह रसायन कई तत्वों के योग से बनता है। इसलिए भारत के पास ‘विचारों का अमृत’ नहीं, बल्कि “विचारों का अमृत” है। यानी कि भारतीय चेतना किसी एक विचार से नहीं बल्कि विभिन्न विचारों से बनी हुई चेतना है इसीलिए उसका स्वरूप अमृतमय हो गया है।

भारतीय विचार के इस कुंड में किसी एक विचार की धारा न होकर विभिन्न विचारों की धाराएं आकर गिरती हैं। यदि आप कबीर के निर्गुण ब्रह्म , महात्मा गांधी की प्रार्थना, लोकमान्य तिलक द्वारा रचे गये कर्मयोग, सुभाषचन्द्र बोस का दर्शन (जो दर्शनशास्त्र के विद्यार्थी भी रहे), नेहरू के इतिहास बोध, मौलाना आजाद के कुरान की व्याख्या तथा उस काल के अन्य राजनीति एवं सांस्कृतिक संगठनों के विचारों का मिश्रण तैयार करें, तो जो एक खूबसूरत यौगिक निर्मित होगा, वह होगा-“विचारों का अमृत”। इसी का लिखित रूप हमें भारत के राष्ट्रीय ग्रंथ ‘संविधान’ में दिखाई देता है, जिसे हम “भारत की जीवन संहिता” भी कह सकते हैं।

आजादी के 75 साल के अमृत उत्सव पर निश्चित रूप से इस कोण से भी विचार किया जाना चाहिए ताकि जन-जन तक इसका सही वैचारिक चरित्र पहुंच सके। और यही वह रसायन है, जो इसके अमृतमय चरित्र को बचाकर भविष्य को दैदीप्यमान कर सकता है।



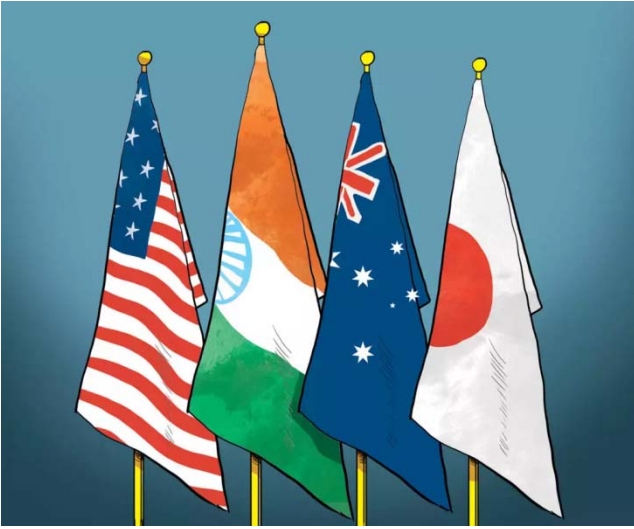
THE TIMES OF INDIA

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Quad: The New Toolkit

For India this could be another Y2K moment – which put it on the path of being a tech power

Indrani Bagchi is The Times of India's diplomatic editor.



“The four leaders did discuss the challenge posed by China, and they made clear that none of them have any illusions about China. But today was not fundamentally about China.” Jake Sullivan’s succinct remarks after the first-ever Quad summit on Friday showed clearly what the Quad is and what it could become.

There’s no doubt a resurgent, aggressive and hegemonistic China is the wind beneath the Quad’s wings. From deadly clashes in eastern Ladakh to rampaging through the South and East China Seas; coercive trade practices, tech theft and cyberattacks; threatening Taiwan and annexing Hong Kong’s politics; unleashing a fishing militia and a trigger-happy coastguard; banning pineapples and wine imports; and

that coronavirus from Wuhan felling the rest of the world ... we’re confronting a global power like no other.

The Quad’s the thin end of the wedge in what promises to become an expanding “toolkit” of a massive counterbalancing exercise. The “coming of age” party for the Quad now makes it a “force for global good” and a “pillar of stability” as PM Modi put it pithily. A joint oped by the four leaders declared, in what you could call a socially distanced ‘high-five’: “The Quad is a flexible group of like-minded partners dedicated to advancing a common vision and to ensuring peace and prosperity.”

Hosting the summit allowed the US to reclaim global leadership, a key element of President Biden’s poll plank. It fixed the US strategic priority of going up against China with allies who had clear skin in the game. The US regained some lost moral equity – by piggybacking on India’s vaccine manufacturing capability to make for the world. US tech leadership will need countries like India and Japan on the same side. US climate leadership can go nowhere without India on board.

The rejuvenated Quad gives Australia and Japan much needed support to stiffen their spine against relentless Chinese coercion. Reeling under recurring Chinese import bans on its barley, coal, wine, there were times when Australia wondered whether it was fighting a lonely battle.

This week, the Japanese envoy to Australia, Shingo Yamagami, said, Australia’s “not walking alone”. “Each and every day Japan is struggling because of ... China, and the rise of China, the dramatic increase of defence spending ... I do marvel at the consistent, persistent, steadfast, resilient response shown by people [in Australia].” Japan has been struggling against China’s coastguard law, import dependence and isn’t doing very well against Covid either. All four countries have felt Chinese aggression to the bone, India’s the only one to have shed blood.

For India, the Quad could be another Y2K moment – 20 years ago a calendar glitch started India off on its journey to becoming a tech and knowledge power. The pandemic and the Quad have given India another moment. Biological E (which, by the way, is a woman-run company, something the government didn’t bother to highlight) could be just the first of many more vaccine giants India can build.

Covid-19 has taught us that the next pandemic isn’t far away. India can put itself ahead of the game by being able to develop vaccines and therapeutics rather than only manufacture them. Adar Poonawalla is

right, allow the pharma sector to grow. Modi wants India to be “pharmacy to the world”. Make it happen. China’s doing the slimy thing of raising API prices, but honestly, that pain should go away in a few years.

On climate change, India has positioned itself as proactive, after spending years being the “No” nation. Last week John Kerry, Biden’s climate czar, said, “India has a plan to produce about 450GW of renewable power by 2030, it’s a very ambitious goal. ... I’ve put together a small consortium of a number of countries that are prepared to help India with some of the finance and transition.” If this works, and we’ll know by COP-26, that could be another growth engine. India today is probably the only big power that can meet its climate goals.

The most important expert group the summit threw up is on technology – going directly to Biden’s aim of creating techno-alliances. That should resonate in India – from 5G to AI to semiconductors and critical materials, these are the discussions and building blocks of the future. This isn’t the time to get nationalistic about tech, it’s the time to put in stakes and build.

This brings me to the absence of mention of security and defence in the Quad statement. There’s been growing “interoperability” between members. India and the US have signed four agreements, the others are Cold War treaty allies. This cooperation is unlikely to be put down on paper. Two things need to happen though – India and the US have to overcome the CAATSA barrier, and India and Japan should be invited as observers to the Five Eyes.

The Quad needn’t grow. But there could be Quad-Plus arrangements – we’ve seen two, one with Vietnam, New Zealand and South Korea, and the other with South Korea, Brazil and Israel. Defence and security Plus groups could have France and Indonesia, one on semiconductors would need Taiwan, Korea and the Netherlands, and so on. The UK will have to do more than send a carrier strike group on a cruise to warrant a place. These would be flexible, coming together for specific purposes. They may not include China.

The Quad joint statement is the first that came with a title. But reading beyond the text, it’s clear the scope will go beyond. If the four countries stay on course and don’t break up the party. For India, the opportunities are considerable. The problems will be much bigger too.

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

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Adding Momentum to Sound Urbanisation

ET Editorials

It is welcome that the micro foundations for competitiveness in urban centres across India and attendant rankings are now a regular feature in policy circles. The Ease of Living Index (EoLI) 2020, which ranks 111 cities on 13 parameters, has placed Bengaluru and Pune as the top performers in the million-plus population category; while Shimla and Bhubaneswar are like-wise in the less-than-a-million list (as per 2011 census). Our urban areas do provide the bulk of economic growth, by far, and cities matter.

The EoLI is an assessment tool to evaluate the quality of living and economic ability of a city, together with its sustainability and resilience. It has a citizen perception survey component with 30% weightage in the index, with the rest 70% weightage distributed across categories such as education, health, economic opportunity, green spaces and city resilience. The index can well provide guidance for evidence-based policymaking and peer learning. In tandem, the Municipal Performance Index (MPI) 2020, which has been undertaken for the first time, places Indore and NDMC as the top performers. The MPI seeks to measure governance, including of the digital variety, in areas such as municipal services, fiscal responsibility and expenditure management, so as to shore up transparency and accountability in urban local government.

The index provides a ranking, but a relative ranking is no guarantee of adequacy. India must plan for the huge influx of rural folk to urban areas that is bound to follow in the wake of, and drive, prosperity. Policies on releasing land for urbanisation without conflict, making land losers stakeholders in the prosperity that is built on their erstwhile land and sound urban planning to optimise energy consumption are key.



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Quad and a strategic update

A rising China has emerged as the biggest challenge to India and the US is increasingly an important of the answer.

C. Raja Mohan, [The writer is Director, Institute for South Asian Studies and a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express]

Global Times, the Chinese newspaper known for its controversial commentary on world affairs, published an essay late last week speculating on the implications of the historic Quad summit for the BRICS — the forum that was the very symbol of India’s much celebrated “strategic autonomy”.

In calling the Quad — India’s coalition with the US and its Asian allies, Australia and Japan — a “negative asset” for the BRICS, where India sits down with China, Russia, Brazil and South Africa, the Global Times was highlighting what it sees as a contradiction in India’s participation in both the forums. “In moving closer to the US and the US-led Quad in recent years”, the paper argued, Delhi has worsened “India-China and India-Russia relations” and halted progress “in the development of BRICS and SCO”. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is the Eurasian forum founded jointly by Beijing and Moscow a quarter of a century ago.

Many have seen India’s oscillation between the BRICS and Quad all these years as a reflection of Delhi’s strategic confusions between the East and the West, and between Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. But the

Global Times sees a strategic pattern in Delhi's behaviour. From Beijing's perspective, India has taken advantage of the BRICS on issues like terrorism and gained access to regional cooperation in inner Asia. At the same time, Beijing sees Delhi's mobilising the Quad as balancing or even "blackmailing" China. Delhi's small band of realists might see that as a compliment coming from Beijing's hyper-realists.

Global Times warns that if Delhi continues to get closer to Washington, India "will eventually lose its strategic autonomy" and become America's "hatchet man against China". But if it had continued with its logic of realpolitik, the paper could quite easily see it is the very quest for "strategic autonomy" that is generating a new Indian warmth towards the US.

That brings us to the central problem in understanding India's "strategic autonomy" — the framework that guided Delhi's international relations since the Cold War. In the early 1990s, strategic autonomy was about creating space for India against the overweening American power after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ideological inertia, however, prevented Delhi's foreign policy discourse from recognising a fundamental transformation in India's external environment over the last three decades. What were the circumstances of the early 1990s that led India to emphasise strategic autonomy against America? And how have they changed over the last three decades to redirect the idea towards China?

In his first term (1993-97), President Bill Clinton questioned the legitimacy of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India and declared the US's intent to resolve Delhi's Kashmir dispute with Pakistan. On top of its Kashmir activism, Washington insisted that rolling back India's nuclear and missile programmes was a major objective of US foreign policy. If Pakistan fanned the fires of a fierce insurgency in Kashmir, the US declared that J&K was the world's most dangerous nuclear flashpoint.

All that changed over the last three decades. Under Clinton's successors, George W Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, Washington discarded its itch to mediate on Kashmir, resolved the nuclear dispute, and widened economic and political cooperation with Delhi to become India's most important strategic partner.

A rising China, in contrast, has emerged as the biggest challenge to India and the US is increasingly an important part of the answer. A few elements stand out. First, with China's growing military power, the PLA has become more assertive on the contested boundary. Amidst the breakdown of peace and tranquillity on the border, the support from the US and its Asian allies has been valuable. Second, on the Kashmir question, it is China that rakes up the issue at the UNSC while the US is helping India to block China's moves. Third, on cross-border terrorism, the US puts pressure on Pakistan and China protects Rawalpindi.

Fourth, the US has facilitated India's integration with the global nuclear order while Beijing blocks Delhi's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Fifth, the US backs India's permanent membership of the UNSC, China does not. Sixth, Delhi now sees the trade with China hollowing out India's manufacturing capability. Its objective on diversifying its economy away from China is shared by the US and the Quad partners. Seventh, India opposes China's Belt and Road Initiative as a project that undermines India's territorial sovereignty and regional primacy. Delhi is working with Quad partners to offer alternatives to the BRI. Finally, Delhi sees China's rising military profile in the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean as a problem and is working with Washington to redress the unfolding imbalance in India's neighbourhood.

These trend lines have evolved over a period of time and the Quad summit is an important part of India's response to the extraordinary challenge that China presents. The BRICS was part of India's strategy in the

unipolar moment that dawned at the end of the Cold War. Delhi's current enthusiasm for the Quad is about limiting the dangers of a unipolar Asia dominated by China.

This does not mean India will walk away from the BRICS. Delhi will continue to attach some value — diplomatic if not strategic — to a forum like the BRICS. After all, the BRICS forum provides a useful channel of communication between Delhi and Beijing at a very difficult moment in the evolution of their bilateral relations. The BRICS is also about India's enduring partnerships with Russia, Brazil, and South Africa. India also values its ties with the Central Asian states in the SCO.

The BRICS could certainly become a productive forum someday — when Delhi and Beijing mitigate their multiple contentions. The Quad is work in progress and is bound to encounter problems of its own down the road. The Global Times is not off the mark in assessing that India's stakes in the Quad might rise faster than those in the BRICS.

Tailpiece: Many observers of the Quad are pleased that the leaders have finally issued a joint statement. Until now, the four parties issued their own separate press releases at the end of each consultation. But it is easy to overestimate the value of joint statements. What matters in the end is the degree of convergence between the interests of the parties.

No amount of words in a BRICS declaration, for example, can paper over the sharpening contradictions between India and China today. The absence of joint statements did not mask the growing strategic congruence among the Quad nations in recent years.

The Quad summit joint statement and the fact sheets added to about 1,600 words. To make the new agenda even more accessible, the Quad leaders published a short opinion piece of 800 words in The Washington Post. Those 800 words could turn out to be far more consequential than the 11,600 words that formed the joint declaration issued by the BRICS summit last November.

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The demographic distress

Northern states continue to lag behind south on population stabilisation, with grim implications for women's equality and political stability

Shailaja Chandra, [The writer was executive director of the National Population Stabilisation Fund and former secretary, Health Ministry]

The National Population Policy 2000 affirmed a commitment to achieve replacement levels of fertility (total fertility rate of 2.1) by 2010. Ten states — Karnataka, Punjab, Gujarat, Assam, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Kerala — and Jammu and Kashmir, have achieved this goal, albeit much delayed. Kerala and Tamil Nadu had accomplished it decades earlier. This fertility decline over half of India has cut across all sections of society — the privileged and the poor, those educated or not, and the high and low caste. The National Family Health Survey-4 has shown how TFR

has reduced even among illiterate women from all religions in the southern states — even in Kerala and Telangana which have a high proportion of Muslims.

The question that arises is how could the Southern states achieve population stabilisation so early and several others could follow suit, while Uttar Pradesh and Bihar continue to drift? When fertility reduction in the five southern states succeeded, irrespective of literacy and education levels and could permeate all sections, it overturns the conventional wisdom that literacy, education and development are prerequisites for populations to stabilise. The simple explanation is that fertility decline was achieved because southern governments proactively urged families to have only two children, followed by female sterilisation immediately thereafter. Almost the entire state apparatus was marshalled to achieve this objective.

The difference between the progressive South and the slowpoke Central- North is becoming disproportionately skewed. UP and Bihar are 23 per cent of India's population and are projected to grow by over 12 per cent and 20 per cent in the next 15 years. Their high TFR pervades all religious groups despite the averment that high fertility prevails disproportionately only among Muslims. Action to prevent unwanted pregnancies particularly in these two Hindi belt states is urgently required.

For decades UP has had a dedicated agency — SIFPSA (State Innovations in Family Planning Services Agency). But its website gives dated information in contrast to its stellar COVID dashboard — demonstrating that communication and technical difficulties are overcome once a subject gains priority. Women in rural UP are still giving birth to four or more children. In some districts, the contraceptive prevalence rate is less than 10 per cent. In many districts neither Hindus nor Muslims use modern family planning methods. In such a scenario, demographics will eclipse economic growth and destroy the gains from a young populace. UP's over-reliance on traditional methods of contraception needs to be swiftly replaced with reliable and easy alternatives .

Bihar has the highest fertility rate in the country and also the highest outmigration. Almost half the women in some districts have a migrant husband and empirical evidence shows women's unwillingness to seek contraception in the absence of the husband, resulting in unprotected sex when he returns.

While national and state policies emphasise male vasectomy, politicians never champion its adoption. No other country in the world uses female sterilisation as excessively as India. After the 2014 Bilaspur outrage, when more than four-score sterilisations were conducted in less than six hours and several women died, one expected that states would go slow on compulsory female sterilisation. But surprisingly, even Kerala with all its progress still relies on female sterilisation (above 88 per cent) as the predominant modern method of contraception.

Indonesia and Bangladesh introduced injectables right from the late 1980s but India only did so in 2016. Executed properly, one jab renders protection from pregnancy for three months. This method needs greater impetus given the helplessness of women who carry the burden of unwanted pregnancies.

Three things are needed: Incentivise later marriages and child births; make contraception easy for women and promote women's labour force participation. The population momentum, if managed properly in the Hindi belt, will remain India's biggest asset until 2055. By 2040, India will be the undisputed king of human capital.

But alongside some other disturbing nationwide trends must also be counteracted without delay because stabilisation isn't only about controlling population growth. A balanced sex ratio is essential to secure social cohesion. Son preference, falling sex ratios, and an abhorrence towards begetting a second or third female child are negative developments that have penetrated even into rural areas. The inheritance law favouring women's rights to ancestral property is far from being implemented. Decades of policing doctors and sonography machines have failed to bear results. China is already facing a demographic catastrophe because its nearly four decade-long one child policy resulted in a strong son preference and a large bride shortage. India will need more than girl friendly schemes to change track.

And then there is ageing. Paradoxically, it is the Southern states that will face problems in future. Having largely redeemed their demographic dividend, the cohort of the elderly will start outstripping the working age population. The theoretical possibility that younger people from the Central-Northern states may fill the growing gap in services will need strong political support. With the "Marathi Manos" syndrome rapidly spreading to many other states such prospects appear to be increasingly uncertain.

The freeze on the state-wise allocation of seats in Parliament until 2026 was extended through the Constitutional (84th Amendment) Act, 2002, to serve "as a motivational measure to pursue population stabilisation" — a goal which has not been achieved. In the absence of further extension, it will be politically destabilising.

India's demography is like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle and whether one starts fitting the pieces at the centre of the puzzle or the corners, greater persistence is needed to complete the picture of a developed India.



Date:16-03-21

Reinventing radical politics, by looking Left

The Left needs to actively pursue agents of change such as secularism, the Green, ethnic and national movements

Shelley Walia has taught Cultural Theory at Panjab University, Chandigarh and is the author of 'Humanities at the Crossroads'

In recent years, radical politics has faced a number of new challenges, not least of which has been the re-emergence of the aggressive, authoritarian state. Hyper-masculine nationalism, and a systemic assault of racist and religious politics on the marginalised are the latest rationale for the aggressive assertion of indiscriminate control of all democratic institutions. Add to this the hegemony of the neo-liberal corporate world along with the demise of the Left and you have the free play of muscular majoritarianism of the Far Right. The Left finds itself in an ideological vacuum.

Anti-globalisation

In the face of the disenchantment with 'free-market' style liberalism and centralist socialism, a need arises to reinvent far-reaching alternatives. The anti-globalisation movement has been in recent years a bulwark against the practices of neo-liberal globalisation in all its signs of voracity, ecological devastation and genetically-modified food. This movement is relative, geographically and temporally, varying in the multifarious contests in which the dark reality of its operation is felt by the public at large. Though universal, it remains relative to varying local conditions but with the common goal of emancipation for all.

In the context of neo-liberalism, the crushing of national dignity by hunger and violence, the unrelenting siege of many developing nations by bankers and by the 'commercial masters of the world', as Eduardo Galeano put it, are some of the factors that must prompt contemporary Marxist critics to not only condemn the systems that have usurped socialism but also recognise that the Left must look into the future for redefining the nature of power and the conditions of existence in a rapidly developing world, thereby striking a balance between technological dominance and liberatory politics.

Marxist thought now

Post-Marxists, having realised this, have moved away from the straitjacketing of orthodox Marxism that lays emphasis on the predominance of the central role of the proletariat. The orthodox Marxist model favouring the economic determinism of history and consciousness that overlooks the role of political movements stands revised and reformulated with the trend in Marxist thought moving towards the examination of wider processes of society, especially the role of the media and the building of a new alliance between feminists, marginalised groups, gays, lesbians, ethnic groups, teachers, thereby developing a radical movement for social transformation.

The focus is therefore on a more decentralised, pluralistic, and inclusive political system. In many ways, the target is not merely capitalism but other contested areas such as racism, privatisation, workplace surveillance, bureaucratisation, etc. The irrational mystifications of the dominant discourse of religion and ethnicity stand deconstructed by a more conflictual social existence that is experienced in all aspects of our social and political world.

Inevitably, the spectre of Marx lurks at those moments of history when economic deprivation becomes rampant and where progressive struggles gear up for political and economic reorganisation. It is clear, therefore, that the predicament of reinventing and restructuring the Left remains acute within the context of the right-wing regimes with the corporate complexion as in India or the United States or Chile that are faced by serious issues of communalism, caste oppression, environmental degradation, gender discrimination and poverty. A serious consideration of the re-evaluation of economic progress, of the future of Marxism, and, more than anything else, of the reenergising of the organisational strength through mass mobilisation is consequently imperative for the success of mitigating mass unemployment, homelessness, violence, famine and economic oppression.

A phase of hope

The theoretical position of Marxism, thus, will have to be revised ensuring that more than the belief in the working class revolution ushering in a classless society, it is the agents of change such as secularism, the Green movement, and ethnic and national movements that need to be aggressively pursued. Though the

struggle of the Left against the state has often led to its defeat, it has managed to regain its vigour by aligning itself to the liberal forces and its imperceptibly growing political awakening as is visible in the farmers' strike or the awakening of radical student consciousness. Its strength in the coming days would depend on the consolidation of Left forces not on any grounds of expediency, but on ideological grounds with the aim of working together for an innovative and transformed future free of right-wing authoritarianism.

The Left, thus, is passing through a new phase of hope and forward-looking expectation with newfound passion for a complete turnaround through new strategies of mobilisation. The revival of people's movements in Latin America, in Greece and in Spain along with the fury of the Arab Spring gave a new impetus to the wilting Left so as to challenge the neo-liberal moral high ground that has failed to offer any solution to a fragile, and the appalling present. It is hoped that the politics of the Left will impact a polarised nation ravaged by ethnic, religious and nationalist conflicts, offering a viable alternative to the emerging demise of democracy.

Consider, for example, Marx's prediction of how the inherent conflict between capital and labour would manifest itself. As he wrote in *Das Kapital*: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery..." When the richest 1% hold more wealth than the bottom 90%, change is inevitable. The rise of the Bernie Sanders phenomenon, for example, has significantly brought a fundamental shift in the Democratic Party towards left of centre. The burgeoning sea of young supporters behind Mr. Sanders will demand this change towards a progressive agenda clamouring for a shift towards the 90% languishing in low paying jobs and sunk in debt.

Undoubtedly, the Republicans in the United States, or the right-wing forces in India, are inveterate in following a pattern of relentlessly reproaching progressive thinkers only because of the oppositional voice that comes into clash with its larger inherent proclivity. This neo-liberal high ground expressed in the sham of the loud claims of a better tomorrow comes in direct conflict with a rational and an open knowledge-driven society connected with the masses in a symphony of free expression stimulating a debate on the successive structural crises of inequality, industry and global finance.

The task ahead

A multiracial society, therefore, must aim for a more democratically functional system as opposed to the vicious politics of division perpetuated and practised in most of the democracies across the world. Transformative racial policy, on the other hand, will ensure the fostering of an equitable and indiscriminate society at a juncture when a rabid form of ultra-nationalism is resulting in creating a fragmented world. A new progressive movement for an open and participatory form of socialism must be the objective espoused on the Left for a tenacious resolve to seek reform through measures of putting jobs at the top of the economic agenda, increasing the funding for public health care, ending police brutality, and gearing up movements at the grassroots.

The task before radical activism therefore, is to examine and question the formulation of public policies with the foremost attention on their relevance to the masses as opposed to the scourge of neo-liberalism as well as the elitist forms of knowledge. The sooner we realise the cataclysmic crisis of capitalism the better equipped we will be to confront a murky future. Like Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour Party, the message sent out by a progressive leadership must rise above cheap populism of laying the solutions on a platter for the public, and instead, reason with them to begin realising that the answers to the problems lie with them and that they need to collectively get more organised. With a new 'people's

powered politics' of sharing and debating, self-confidence could be inculcated to shape a social environment deeply unbiased and just.

Date:16-03-21

A giant leap forward for the Quad

The productive dialogue and substantive joint statement of the summit show the grouping's significance

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House, and a former Ambassador to Myanmar and DCM in Jakarta

The maiden Quadrilateral Security Dialogue summit of the leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. on March 12 was a defining moment in Asian geopolitics. That it was a meeting at the highest political level, occasioned a productive dialogue, and concluded with a substantive joint statement is indicative of its immediate significance. The summit showed that the "Quad has come of age", as underlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. If it leads to tangible action and visible cooperation, it will impact the whole region.

The Quad is no longer a loose coalition. The Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004 triggered cooperation among the navies and governments of the Quad powers. They sought to forge diplomatic cooperation on regional issues in 2006-08, but gave up mainly because China objected to it and the hostility to China was not yet a potent enough glue.

This began to change in 2017 when Beijing's behaviour turned hostile, climaxing in multiple challenges in 2020, including its adventurism in eastern Ladakh. The Foreign Ministers of the Quad met thrice between September 2019 and February 2021. This time, U.S. President Joe Biden moved swiftly to host a virtual summit, drawing immediate response from the other three leaders.

Five highlights

The Quad's new approach may be somewhat different from the Trump era. The former U.S. President's tough line on China is now indispensable, but without the name-calling of Beijing. A more sophisticated approach is being invented, with enhanced emphasis by the U.S. on carrying its allies and strategic partners together. The summit's outcome, therefore, merits close attention for at least five reasons.

First, past debates over diverse, even differing, visions of the Indo-Pacific are over. The joint statement struck a neat compromise: to please the U.S. and Japan, it refers to a "free and open" Indo-Pacific, but in the very next sentence it offers an elaboration – "free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion" – that amply satisfy India and Australia.

Second, the summit leaders have secured an adequate alignment of their approaches towards China, even without mentioning the 'C' word in the document. Senior officials gave sufficient hints on this score, reinforced by phrases such as "security challenges" and "the rules-based maritime order in the East and

South China Seas” in the joint statement. The context and the subtext need to be appreciated for a full understanding. Given the bipartisan consensus in Washington and the state of China’s fraught relations with the other three capitals, a clear-eyed assessment of the threat from China is shared by all. But instead of unidimensional antagonism, the Quad members have preferred a smart blend of competition, cooperation and confrontation. Further clarity should emerge after discussions between the top officials of the U.S. and China, set for March 18.

Third, the Quad has placed a premium on winning the battle for the hearts and minds of people in the Indo-Pacific region. The aim is to convince the nations of Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Indian Ocean region that the Quad is a benign grouping, committed to solutions for their development and well-being. This explains the special initiative to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for every person in need in the region from the western Pacific to eastern Africa. It is both a laudable and doable objective, given the firm commitment of financial support by the U.S. and Japan, logistics and some funding from Australia, and the manufacturing and managerial capabilities of India. This new synergy is a real highlight that should result in the production of one billion vaccine doses in India by 2022.

Fourth, the establishment of three working groups on vaccine partnership; climate change; and critical and emerging technologies (such as telecom and biotechnology) and their new standards, innovation and supply chains is a welcome step. Joint R&D projects may become essential. All this should get the four national establishments into serious policy coordination and action mode, creating new capacities. The careful choice of themes reflects a deep understanding of the long-term challenge posed by China and has global implications.

Finally, the March 12 summit will not be a one-off. The leaders have agreed to meet in-person later this year, possibly at an international event within the region. Foreign ministers will gather at least once a year; other relevant officials, more often. Thus, will grow the habits of the Quad working together for a common vision and with agreed modalities for cooperation.

Other aspects

The summit has been watched closely by the ASEAN capitals. A few of them may express cautious welcome. Beijing seems rattled but resigned to the Quad’s new momentum. The Chinese see it in negative terms, targeting New Delhi in particular. The refrain of “India is moving too close to the U.S.” has, after the summit, become India is “a negative asset of BRICS and SCO”, as claimed by a Chinese government mouthpiece. Such views should be dismissed as inconsequential.

Among other issues discussed, the Korean Peninsula drew particular attention. The commitment to the “complete de-nuclearization” of North Korea as per the United Nations Security Council resolutions was reiterated – a reference to the importance of South Korea as a partner of the Quad. On Myanmar, Washington heeded wise counsel from Asia. The call “to restore democracy and the priority of strengthening democratic resilience” is unexceptionable. It may help ASEAN in carrying forward its diplomatic initiative to promote reconciliation in Myanmar.

The lucid joint op-ed in The Washington Post by the four leaders projects the Quad as “a flexible group of like-minded partners dedicated to advancing a common vision and to ensuring peace and prosperity”.

The summit and ‘The Spirit of the Quad’ – the inspired title of the joint statement – represented a giant leap forward. Now is the time to back political commitment with a strong mix of resolve, energy, stamina and the fresh ideas of stakeholders and experts outside of government to fulfil the promise of the Quad.

Date: 16-03-2

The limits of POCSO

A recent judgment highlights the need to reconsider POCSO’s absolutist approach to adolescent sexuality needs

Shraddha Chaudhary is Lecturer, Jindal Global Law School, Sonipat, and PhD candidate at the Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge. She was a researcher for two of the five State studies referenced here



A single bench of the Madras High Court recently allowed a petition seeking to quash a case of kidnap, aggravated penetrative sexual assault and aggravated sexual assault of a minor. Aggravated penetrative sexual assault under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 is the equivalent provision for aggravated rape. A person can be charged with this offence in certain aggravating circumstances, such as if the rape occurs within a relationship of trust or authority, or if it leads to pregnancy, among others. Under POCSO, the consent of a person under the age of 18 is irrelevant, regardless of the nature and circumstance of the sexual interaction, or the particulars of the person with whom it takes place. This

means that any sex with a minor is rape.

Sexual tendencies of adolescents

The judgment echoes the arguments that child rights activists have been making for years: by ignoring the natural sexual tendencies of adolescents, POCSO can and does become a tool for the persecution of young people in consenting sexual relations. The court reasoned that adolescence and young adulthood form a continuum because of the physical, biological, neurological, and social changes that occur during this time. The implication is that people within this age group may be clubbed together notwithstanding the legal line drawn at 18. This informed the court’s view of the relationship of the minor ‘victim’ with the accused respondent as being a loving, rather than an abusive, one.

The judgment concluded that the case could be quashed because it was purely individual in nature and doing so would not affect any overriding public interest. However, in doing this, it ignored the established precedent against quashing cases of rape, a heinous and serious offence, held by the Supreme Court to be a public concern, and not a private matter. Perhaps the court was persuaded in taking this course because

of its observation that POCSO could not have been intended to bring such cases within its scope. In making this observation, the court relied on the Statement of Objects and Reasons of POCSO, which states that the law was enacted pursuant to Article 15 of the Constitution, which allows the state to make special provisions for women and children, and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and pornography.

However, neither the founding documents nor the listed categories of offences give a sense of what the limits of POCSO were meant to be. The Parliamentary Committee (Rajya Sabha) which considered the POCSO Bill, 2011 had, in fact, criticised the clause providing for the possibility of consent in cases of sexual intercourse with minors between the ages of 16 and 18. It believed that a uniform age of 18 would ensure that trials of child rape would focus on the conduct of the accused and the circumstances of the offence, instead of putting victims on trial as is often the case when the consent of the victim is in question. This would indicate that adolescent sexuality was not meant to be an exception to POCSO's bright-line approach.

The five State studies on the functioning of Special Courts under the POCSO Act, conducted by the Centre for Child and the Law, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru, have demonstrated that these de facto consensual cases are complicated. While adolescents can and do choose to have sex, it is a fact that they are still children, and their nascent sexual autonomy is susceptible to abuse. This contradiction created by the very nature of adolescence has led to inconsistent and unprincipled adjudication. The absolute age line of POCSO has not prevented the insensitive assessment of minors' consent. At the same time, it has forced courts to choose between applying the law and doing justice, especially in cases where the minor victim has willingly eloped with or married the accused or is carrying his child, for imprisoning him would only do her harm.

A just verdict

Therefore, the judgment was intuitively just, even though it was not in line with precedent. It highlighted the urgent need for a reconsideration of the absolutist approach of POCSO when it comes to the sexual interactions of adolescents with other young people. Courts need to be able to strike a balance between the limited but developing capacity of adolescents to consent to sexual interaction and their vulnerability to being groomed, abused, and exploited. For this to be possible, the legislature must provide clarity on the core wrongs that POCSO is meant to address, so that valid conclusions may be drawn about what is the intent of the law, and what is clearly outside its purpose.



Date: 16-03-21

अदालती फैसले आम लोग भी समझ पाएं

संपादकीय

एक राज्य की हाईकोर्ट बेंच का एक फैसला सुप्रीम कोर्ट के लिए शाब्दिक तौर पर सिरदर्द बन गया। अदालत की दो-सदस्यीय बेंच के एक जज ने तो भरी अदालत में कहा 'मुझे इसे पढ़ने के बाद सिरदर्द का बाम लगाना पड़ा।' अपने आदेश में भी सुप्रीम कोर्ट ने कहा कि इनमें सही व सहज भाषा का प्रयोग न होने से पूरी न्याय प्रक्रिया का उद्देश्य पराजित होता है। यह न्याय के उद्देश्य को क्षति पहुंचाने जैसा है। सुप्रीम कोर्ट को हाईकोर्ट के फैसले समझ न आने की वजह है, उसमें भाषा कठिन है और शब्द व वाक्य-विन्यास भी कोई अर्थ संप्रेषित नहीं करते? इससे नुकसान यह होता है कि अगर उनमें सरकार के लिए कोई आदेश हैं तो उन पर अमल मुश्किल होता है। उधर दूसरा पक्ष पुनः अपील में जाता है, जिससे अदालतों का काम बढ़ता है। यहां लोगों के जीवन का फैसला होता है, जिनमें अधिकांश गरीब हैं जो न्याय के लिए सर्वोच्च अदालत में आने में असमर्थ हैं। ऐसे में फैसलों में विरेधाभास, न्याय प्रणाली के सत्य के प्रति अटूट आग्रह के सिद्धांत में शक पैदा करता है। लिहाजा कोर्ट की इस टिप्पणी के बाद कम से कम हाईकोर्ट और सुप्रीम कोर्ट के स्तर पर फैसले (ओबिटर डिक्टा) स्पष्ट और उस फैसले का औचित्य (रेशिओ डेसिडेन्डी) सरल व समझाने वाला होना चाहिए। कोर्ट फैसले ऐसे लिखें ताकि आम लोग भी समझें।



Date:16-03-21

दुनिया को दिशा दिखाने वाला क्वाड

हर्ष वी पंत, (लेखक ऑब्जर्वर रिसर्च फाउंडेशन में रणनीतिक अध्ययन कार्यक्रम के निदेशक हैं)

बीते एक हजार साल से दुनिया में उतना बदलाव नहीं आया, जितना बीते दस वर्षों में हुआ है। इसी तरह विगत एक वर्ष में दुनिया बदलाव के उससे भी बड़े दौर से गुजरी है, जितना पिछले दस वर्षों के दौरान हुआ। क्वाड भी ऐसे परिवर्तनों का एक अहम पड़ाव और परिणाम है। यह चार देशों का एक ऐसा उभरता हुआ समूह है, जो विस्तारवादी, बिगडैल और अडियल चीन को चुनौती देने का माद्दा रखता है। भारत, अमेरिका, जापान और ऑस्ट्रेलिया की चौकड़ी से बने इस समूह के राष्ट्राध्यक्षों ने गत शुक्रवार को अपने विचार साझा किए। मौजूदा दौर में यह घटनाक्रम अपने आप में अत्यंत महत्वपूर्ण है। इसे शीत युद्ध की समाप्ति के बाद सबसे उल्लेखनीय वैश्विक पहल कहा जा रहा है।

इसमें कोई संदेह नहीं कि हिंद प्रशांत क्षेत्र समकालीन भू-राजनीति का केंद्र बिंदु है। लंबे समय तक इस क्षेत्र को अनदेखा ही किया गया। कुछ समय पूर्व ही इसे मान्यता मिलनी शुरू हुई है, लेकिन अभी भी उसके लिए एक संस्थागत ढांचे का अभाव है। इसकी पूर्ति करने में क्वाड पूरी तरह सक्षम है। अब यह एक औपचारिक मंच के रूप में आकार लेता दिख रहा है। इसे मिल रही महत्ता का अंदाजा इसी तथ्य से लगाया जा सकता है कि अमेरिकी राष्ट्रपति बनने के बाद जो बाइडन ने अपनी पहली बहुपक्षीय वार्ता के लिए क्वाड जैसे संगठन को चुना, जो अभी तक अनौपचारिक स्वरूप में ही है। बाइडन

का यह दांव उन लोगों के लिए किसी झटके से कम नहीं, जो यह अनुमान लगा रहे थे कि ट्रंप प्रशासन के बाद बाइडन हिंद-प्रशांत क्षेत्र के लिए एक अलग राह चुन सकते हैं। बाइडन ने क्वाड के सहयोगियों के साथ एक स्वतंत्र एवं मुक्त हिंद प्रशांत क्षेत्र की प्रतिबद्धता व्यक्त कर अपने पते खोल दिए हैं।

क्वाड का विचार नया नहीं है। वर्ष 2007 में जापान ने इसकी पहल की थी, लेकिन भारत और ऑस्ट्रेलिया जैसे देश इसे लेकर हिचक रहे थे। उनकी हिचक की मुख्य वजह यह थी कि कहीं चीन इससे कुपित न हो जाए, लेकिन बीते एक वर्ष के घटनाक्रम ने इन दोनों देशों की बीजिंग को लेकर सोच बदल दी। केवल भारत और ऑस्ट्रेलिया ही नहीं, अपितु अमेरिका की भी हाल के दौर में व्यापार, ताइवान और विश्व स्वास्थ्य संगठन जैसे कई मसलों पर चीन के साथ तनातनी बढ़ी है। वहीं कोरोना काल में अपनी हेठी दिखाने के साथ-साथ चीन ने ऑस्ट्रेलिया पर व्यापारिक और भारत पर सामरिक शिकंजा कसने का प्रयास किया। जापान के साथ तो उसके शाश्वत विवाद और सामुद्रिक सीमा के मुद्दे फंसे ही हुए हैं। इस प्रकार विगत एक वर्ष के घटनाक्रम ने क्वाड के उभार में निर्णायक भूमिका निभाई, क्योंकि इससे जुड़े देशों को यह आभास हुआ कि चीन को उसकी भाषा में जवाब देना आवश्यक हो गया है। इस तरह कोरोना काल में नया आकार लेता वैश्विक ढांचा क्वाड की नियति में नाटकीय बदलाव का निमित्त बना। इन चारों देशों के साथ आने से अब बीजिंग के तेवर भी बदले हुए हैं। उसे समझ आ गया है कि जब दुनिया की बड़ी शक्तियां लामबंद होंगी तो उसके क्या निहितार्थ हो सकते हैं? यही कारण है कि कुछ समय पहले तक क्वाड को लेकर आंखें तरेरने वाला चीन अब सहयोग और मित्रता की भाषा बोल रहा है। चीन की ऐसी चिकनी-चुपड़ी बातें हाथी के दांत खाने के और- दिखाने के और वाली कहावत को चरितार्थ करने जैसी हैं। ऐसा इसलिए, क्योंकि बीते कुछ दशकों से दुनिया चीन की दबंगई देख चुकी है और विगत एक वर्ष में चीन का पूरा चरित्र दुनिया के सामने उजागर हो चुका है। उसके बढ़ते दबदबे और दुस्साहस पर विराम लगाने के लिए क्वाड वही विचार है, जिसके साकार रूप लेने का समय अब आ गया है। अच्छी बात यह है कि इससे जुड़े अंशभागी भी यह भलीभांति समझ रहे हैं। उनके बीच बढ़ता सहयोग इसका सूचक है।

गत वर्ष मालाबार साझा युद्ध अभ्यास में अमेरिका और जापान के साथ ऑस्ट्रेलिया की सक्रिय भागीदारी इस संगठन के लिए शुभ संकेत और वैश्विक भू-राजनीति में एक नई धमक के रूप में देखी गई। इन देशों की साझेदारी भी बहुत स्वाभाविक है, क्योंकि ये सभी मूल रूप से लोकतांत्रिक और उदार व्यवस्था वाले देश हैं, जिनकी तमाम अहम मुद्दों पर सोच एक दूसरे से मेल खाती है। जैसे ये सभी एकमत हैं कि धरती पर मौजूद उन दुर्लभ संसाधनों के संरक्षण के लिए कोई कारगर पहल करनी ही होगी, जिनका चीन बेहिसाब दोहन करने में लगा हुआ है। जलवायु परिवर्तन की गंभीरता को भी ये बखूबी समझते हैं। वैश्विक आपूर्ति शृंखला को चीन से स्थानांतरित करने की दिशा में भी ये प्रयासरत हैं। इसका सबसे सुखद प्रमाण यह देखने को मिल रहा है कि अमेरिका, जापान और ऑस्ट्रेलिया कोरोना वैक्सीन के उत्पादन में भारत की क्षमताओं को और बढ़ाने के पक्षधर हैं। ऐसे परस्पर सहयोग को देखते हुए क्वाड में किसी किस्म की खटपट जैसी आशंका नहीं रह जाती।

शिथिल पड़े क्वाड संगठन में एकाएक नई जान आना जितना चौंकाने वाला है, उतना ही भारत को लेकर इसका रवैया भी। एक समय जो भारत क्वाड के मंच पर इन्फ्रा फाइनैसिंग और सांस्कृतिक विनिमय जैसे सॉफ्ट मसलों तक ही सीमित रहता था, वही अब इसकी केंद्रीय भूमिका में आता प्रतीत होता है। यानी जिसे क्वाड की कमजोर कड़ी माना जा रहा था, वही उसकी ताकत बनता दिख रहा है। अतीत में भारत के रवैये को दुलमुल माना जाता था, लेकिन चीन के साथ सीमा पर तल्खी के दौरान अपने सख्त तेवरों के अलावा कई अन्य कदमों से उसने दुनिया का भरोसा जीता है। आने वाले समय में यह समूह वैश्विक भू-राजनीति को दिशा देने वाला सिद्ध हो सकता है। हिंद-प्रशांत क्षेत्र में चीन से भयाक्रांत

देशों को इससे बहुत बड़ा सहारा और चीन के मुकाबले एक उचित विकल्प मिलेगा। इसकी महत्ता और प्रासंगिकता इसी से समझी जा सकती है कि आसियान देशों के अलावा ब्रिटेन और फ्रांस जैसे राष्ट्र भी इसका दायरा बढ़ाकर उसमें शामिल होने की उत्सुकता दिखा रहे हैं, जिसके लिए क्वाड प्लस जैसा नाम भी सोच लिया गया है। यह लगभग तय है कि आने वाले समय में क्वाड का विस्तार होगा और वह और अधिक सशक्त रूप में उभरेगा। यही इसके उज्ज्वल भविष्य को दर्शाने के लिए पर्याप्त है।

जनसत्ता

Date: 16-03-21

सहेजना होगा बारिश का पानी

अतुल कनक

पिछले दिनों दिल्ली जल बोर्ड के उपाध्यक्ष के एक वक्तव्य के बाद दिल्ली की जनता गर्मी के दिनों में जल संकट की आशंका से त्रस्त हो गई। इस बयान में कहा गया था कि भाखड़ा नांगल प्रबंधन 25 मार्च से 24 अप्रैल तक के लिए नांगल जल नहर में पानी का प्रवाह रोकना चाहता है। पूरे एक महीने पानी का प्रवाह रोकने के प्रस्ताव के मूल में मरम्मत की जरूरत को बताया गया। दिल्ली जल बोर्ड ने भाखड़ा नांगल प्रबंधन को एक पत्र लिख कर आग्रह भी किया कि प्रस्तावित अवधि में गर्मी का मौसम शुरू हो जाएगा। ऐसे में पानी की खपत और जरूरत बढ़ जाती है। इसलिए फिलहाल पानी के प्रवाह को रोकने के प्रस्ताव पर पुनर्विचार किया जाए, वरना दिल्ली में अफरा-तफरी मच जाएगी। उल्लेखनीय है कि नांगल नहर से दिल्ली को अपने लिए कुल आवश्यक जलापूर्ति का पच्चीस फीसद हिस्सा प्राप्त होता है। आशंका जताई गई कि यदि प्रस्तावित तरीके से नहर में पानी का प्रवाह रोक दिया गया तो न केवल आम आदमी का जीवन प्रभावित होगा, बल्कि राष्ट्रपति भवन, प्रधानमंत्री निवास, संसद, सर्वोच्च न्यायालय और कई दूतावासों को भी पानी की आपूर्ति पर प्रतिकूल असर पड़ेगा।

उल्लेखनीय है कि दिल्ली शहर पानी की आपूर्ति के लिए इस जल नहर के अलावा यमुना, गंगा नदी और भूजल पर निर्भर है। दिल्ली के आसपास यमुना नदी में बढ़ता प्रदूषण आए दिन चर्चा का विषय बना रहता है। नदियों की शुचिता के प्रति हमारा व्यवहार इसी तरह उपेक्षा भरा बना रहा तो नदियां कब तक सबकी प्यास बुझाने के अपने संकल्प का निर्वाह कर सकेंगी, यह सवाल हर संवेदनशील मन को मथता रहता है। अदूरदर्शी नीतियों के कारण उत्तर भारत के संपूर्ण मैदानी क्षेत्र में भूगर्भीय जल का इतना अंधाधुंध दोहन हुआ है कि कई स्थानों पर हैंडपंप हांफने लगे हैं। केंद्रीय जलशक्ति मंत्रालय न देश के सत्रह राज्यों में ऐसे 1186 ब्लॉक चिह्नित किए हैं, जहां पानी का संकट बहुत गंभीर है। योजना है कि इन स्थानों पर वैज्ञानिक भेजे जाएंगे, जो विस्तृत अध्ययन के बाद क्षेत्र विशेष में जल संकट के समाधान का वैज्ञानिक हल सुझाएंगे।

लेकिन किसी भी इलाके में जल संकट का सबसे सटीक समाधान इसके अलावा क्या हो सकता है कि जल का अपव्यय रोका जाए और वर्षा जल का संग्रहण करके भूगर्भीय जलस्तर को बनाए रखने और बढ़ाने की कोशिश की जाए। हमारे पूर्वज इस सत्य को पहचानते थे और इसीलिए कुंओं, तालाबों, कुंडों या बावड़ियों का निर्माण करवाना बहुत पुण्यदायी कार्य माना जाता था। राजस्थान के जैसलमेर में एक तालाब है- गढ़सीसर तालाब। बरसात के दिन शुरू होने के ठीक पहले इस तालाब की सफाई की जाती थी। यह एक बड़ा अनुष्ठान होता था और स्वयं जैसलमेर शासक इस अवसर पर श्रमदान करते थे। पहली बारिश के बाद इस तालाब में स्नान करना भी अपराध माना जाता था। दरअसल, यह पानी की शुचिता को बचाने का नहीं, जीवन की आशाओं को बचाए रखने का प्रावधान था। जैसलमेर राजस्थान के मरुस्थलीय इलाके का एक शहर है और मरुस्थलवासियों से अधिक पानी के महत्व को कौन समझ सकता है? ऐसा नहीं है कि दिल्ली पानी के महत्व से अपरिचित हो। जहां-जहां भी जीवन है, पानी का महत्व है। तभी तो रहीम ने कहा था- 'बिन पानी सब सूना' रहीम का जन्म इसी दिल्ली में 17 दिसंबर 1556 को हुआ था और वे अकबर के दरबार के इतिहास प्रसिद्ध नौ रत्नों में एक थे। कहते हैं कि अकबर ने जिस फतेहपुर सीकरी को बसाया, मुगलों द्वारा उसे छोड़े जाने के प्रमुख कारणों में एक यह भी रहा कि फतेहपुर सीकरी में पानी की किल्लत होने लगी थी। क्या रहीम ने ऐसी ही किसी किल्लत से गुजरते हुए 'रहीमन पानी राखिये' जैसा अपना प्रसिद्ध दोहा लिखा था?

प्रारंभ से ही मनुष्य की यह प्रवृत्ति रही कि वह उन्हीं जगहों को अपने आश्रय का स्थान बनाता है, जहां पानी की उपलब्धता सहजता से हो जाए। इसीलिए नदी घाटी सभ्यताएं अस्तित्व में आईं। लेकिन विकास के नाम पर मनुष्य ने पानी के संचय और संरक्षण की आवश्यकता को अनदेखा कर दिया, जो जीवन की मूलभूत आवश्यकताओं में एक था। हम जानते हैं कि तमाम वैज्ञानिक प्रगति के बावजूद हम अपनी समस्त जरूरतों को पूरा करने लायक पानी का निर्माण किसी प्रयोगशाला में नहीं कर सकते। दुनिया के दो तिहाई हिस्से में पानी है, लेकिन अधिकांश पानी समुद्र में होने के कारण मनुष्य आज भी अपनी जल आवश्यकता के लिए प्रकृति पर निर्भर है। प्रकृति का दिया हुआ जल हमें नदियों के माध्यम से मिलता है या बरसात से। हमारे पूर्वज न केवल पानी के उपयोग के प्रति, बल्कि उसके संरक्षण के प्रति भी संवेदनशील थे। इसीलिए हमारे यहां वर्षा जल संरक्षण के लिए कुएं, तालाब, बावड़ी, कुंड, जोहड़ बनाने की परंपरा रही है। ये जल संसाधन न केवल बारिश का पानी स्वयं में सिंचित कर लेते थे, बल्कि इनसे जमीन में रिसता हुआ पानी भूजल के स्तर को बढ़ाने में भी महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका अदा करता था। बारिश के पानी को सहेजना इसलिए जरूरी है कि भारत में हर साल होने वाली औसतन 1170 मिलीमीटर बारिश का अधिकांश पानी वर्षा ऋतु के कुछ ही दिनों में बरस जाता है। पुराने दिनों में बरसाती नदियां भी इस पानी को सहेज लिया करती थीं। लेकिन ये छोटी नदियां भी अनियोजित नगर नियोजन की भेंट चढ़ गईं। पानी के सहज प्रवाह के मार्ग में बस्तियां बसा दी गईं। यही कारण है कि जरा-सी बारिश तेज होते ही कई नगरों में बाढ़ के हालात बन जाते हैं।

कृत्रिम जल संसाधन क्षेत्र बना कर बारिश के पानी को सहेजा जाना चाहिए था। यह नगरीकरण की एक सार्थक नीति होती। लेकिन विकास के नाम पर ऐसे अधिकांश जल संसाधनों को पाट दिया गया। दिल्ली में ही कई प्राचीन कुएं और बावड़ियां थीं। इसका सबसे बड़ा उदाहरण है- खारी बावड़ी। यह नाम अब एक बड़े किराना बाजार का है। दुकानों और अन्य इमारतों को बनाने की होड़ में खारी बावड़ी पाट दी गई। कोटला मुबारकपुर की बावड़ी कहां गई, कोई नहीं जानता। कुछ लेखकों ने महरौली को बावड़ियों का शहर कहा है। राजों की बैन, गंधक की बावड़ी, कुतुबशाह की बावड़ी, औरंगजेब की बावड़ी इस इलाके की प्रसिद्ध बावड़ियां रही हैं। स्थिति यह है कि कनाट प्लेस जैसे चहल-पहल वाले इलाके में स्थित उग्रसेन की बावड़ी भी, जिसे कुछ लोग दिल्ली की सबसे भव्य बावड़ी भी मानते हैं, अपनी गुमनामी पर उदास-सी दिखती है।

तमाम प्राचीन जल संसाधन वर्षा जल को सहेज कर उस भूजल के स्तर को बनाए रखने में महत्वपूर्ण भूमिका अदा कर सकते हैं, जो आबादी के एक बड़े हिस्से के लिए जरूरतें पूरी करने का सबसे बड़ा साधन है। दिल्ली सरकार ने कुछ समय पहले इस जरूरत को पहचाना और अगस्त 2019 में उत्तर पश्चिम दिल्ली के सुंगरपुर गांव में यमुना किनारे तालाब की खुदाई शुरू करवाई गई। इस योजना को शुरू करते हुए दिल्ली के मुख्यमंत्री अरविंद केजरीवाल ने कहा था कि पल्ला गांव से लेकर वजीराबाद तक के करीब बीस किलोमीटर के हिस्से में ऐसे तालाब खुदवाए जाएंगे जो न केवल वर्षा जल संचित करेंगे, बल्कि जब यमुना में बाढ़ आएगी तो ये बाढ़ के अतिरिक्त पानी को स्वयं में सिंचित कर लेंगे।

जल संकट के कारण पैदा होने वाली सभी अप्रिय घटनाओं से बचने का एक ही मंत्र है कि हम वर्षा जल संग्रहण के प्रति जागरूक हों। इसके लिए जरूरी है कि बड़ी इमारतों में वर्षा जल को संरक्षित करने के लिए अनिवार्य इंतजाम किए जाएं, वर्षा जल संग्रहण के लिए नए तालाब खुदवाए जाएं और जहां कहीं उपलब्ध हैं, प्राचीन कुंओं, तालाब, बावड़ियों और कुंडों का संरक्षण किया जाए। चूंकि यह काम बहुत महत्वपूर्ण है, इसलिए नीति निर्माताओं को इस दिशा में पहल करने के लिये मानसून की दस्तक का इंतजार नहीं करना चाहिए।
