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India's law and order matrix needs a reboot

With the evolving security scenario resulting in complex internal and external challenges, the nature of the security discourse as well as ground techniques have to be improved.

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The annual All India Conference of Directors General/Inspectors General of Police which was held recently, witnessed a departure from the past, when some aspects that were discussed found their way into the public domain. This led to an element of controversy over the management of certain issues, specially on the border, but little else. In its present form, the DGPs/IGPs conference is a relatively new construct (1980), superseding the earlier annual conference of Heads of Intelligence and CIDs of different States. The latter

conference used to deal mainly with the nitty-gritty of police work, viz., intelligence, crime and criminal investigation, technology and the forensic aspects, while the conference now additionally deals with a host of other issues including Policy and personnel matters.

In-depth discussion is taking a hit

The proliferation of subjects up for discussion in recent conferences, and the presence of increasing numbers of delegates to cover the various subjects leave little scope for any in-depth discussion. Today's security threats have an all-embracing character and there is a crying need for in-depth discussions on futuristic themes in policing, such as cyber crime, the dark web, crypto, maritime security, the threat from drones, and also problems stemming from an unchecked social media. These are in addition to subjects such as left-wing extremism, counter-terrorism, drug trafficking and border issues. Lack of adequate time to discuss these matters in detail tend to undermine both the quality of the debates and possible outcomes.

Admittedly, we may not be standing today at the beginning of history, but the evolving security scenario is producing a myriad of internal and external challenges. As the 21st century advances, security problems will grow at an exponential rate. Their dimensions are as yet unclear, but what is already evident is that the emerging challenges would require greater innovativeness and agility as well as a demonstration of newer cognitive skills to meet the challenges posed by swift technological change and the rise of data war fighting. Hence, decision making in these circumstances needs to undergo fundamental changes, entailing more purposive discussion at higher levels.

Law and order management today would be a good starting point in this context. This subject may appear rather mundane in a world dominated by technology; but what it currently demands is a combination of newer skills, in both technology and crowd management, which are not readily available among security agencies. The attention of most security forces in the country has essentially been devoted to ongoing threats such as terrorism, which has resulted in law and order management being put on the back burner. Managing today's angry, and often unruly, mobs requires a fresh set of skills and inherent abilities, apart from mere technology. A heavy-handed approach tends to create more problems than they solve. Any approach of this kind only leads to a catastrophic divide between law enforcement agencies and the public, at a time when newer practices and skills are the proper answer.

Hence, much more is clearly required than simply reiterating that technology, including artificial intelligence, can provide answers to a host of problems that exist. Understanding the psychology of agitating mobs and, in turn making them realise the dangers of their own predilections before matters get out of hand, is not an innate, but an acquired skill. This needs better attention.

Police and security agencies, must consequently, be provided with the right attributes, and for which they need to be adequately trained. This would call for a top down approach, as there would be considerable competition of resources from within the agencies for other items such as advances in weaponry and technology. It would be required even more, to secure acceptance of utilitarian aspects of any such move.

Pay attention to selection, skills

The selection of personnel to security agencies, especially the police, also will require a total makeover. The 21st century is proving to be vastly different from the 20th century, and the choice of personnel to man security agencies requires more high-level attention than has been devoted to this task. Most of the debate on this subject has been outside, rather than within the police forces, and the higher echelons of the forces have not spent enough time in determining what can and needs to be done. The police forces must mirror the kind of society we live in today, and must be capable of dealing with today's modern antagonists. The latter often employ a variety of tactics and skills, and use common imagery to keep track of developing situations, including on social media and Twitter. For the police and security forces, this means that more than the mere acquisition of new skills, they must develop a different mind set, including that force cannot be the answer to every situation.

Technological advances worldwide have meant that the human skills of security agencies need to be suitably tailored to a world in which the Internet, social media and other breakthroughs, often provide protestors and agitators an upper hand, and often detrimental to law and order. This has given rise to the importance of 'Open Source intelligence' that is often neglected by security agencies. The proper utilisation of Open Source intelligence could well become the critical factor in managing many law and order situations today. A vast gap exists at present between the need, and on how best to utilise information from open sources.

An added problem, apart from the existing cauldron of events, incidents and situations, is the presence of multiple security agencies, including intelligence and investigative agencies, who seldom act with a common purpose. Their techniques and methodologies tend to be different, often leading to contradictions in approach. While the proliferation of agencies was intended to create specialised agencies for special requirements, this has not happened. Far from easing the burden of individual agencies, they often hinder proper analysis and investigation.

'Small is beautiful'

Hence, what is clear is that there is a very real need to take a hard look at not only improving the nature of the security discourse — in regard to the range and varieties of threats — but also on how to bring about changes in regard to intelligence techniques, investigative methodologies, improving the ground situation, etc. Conventional wisdom would suggest that an apex level meeting of DGPs/IGPs would provide the necessary direction and policy imperatives. The reality is that too broad a sweep, both in terms of the subjects discussed, as well as in the numbers present, tends to affect the quality of the discourse even among dedicated professionals. Meaningful discussions cannot occur when the size of the conference inhibits detailed and frank discussion even in a professional atmosphere. Here, as in many other aspects of life, 'small is beautiful'.

In short order, it can be said that there is a case for splitting the annual conference of DGPs/IGPs into two separate conferences — a higher level conference of DGPs/IGPs to discuss policy related issues, and a separate conference to be held of intelligence and security specialists (IGs/CID) to discuss the finer points of methodology, techniques and acquisition of new skills for current and future problems. Outcomes would then become more relevant to current and future security needs.

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The battle against child marriage

Assam cracks down on child marriage, but activists and health workers seek an all-round approach from education of girls to awareness campaigns to stop the practice.

Rahul Karmakar

For the first time in more than two decades, a police team from the Ulukunchi outpost came asking questions at Birsingi, a village in Assam's West Karbi Anglong district. The visit on February 4 made the hill-dwelling Tiwa tribal people analyse gobhiya thaka, a kind of live-in relationship a few of them still practise.

Birsingi is about 110 km east of Guwahati. "The police came with records of teenage pregnancy and delivery from the Umpanai health sub-centre nearby. It made us think seriously about our practice and when a girl child is old enough to choose to live with her partner," Dilip Timung, a village elder, said. The police inquiry pertained to a non-local teenage girl who had come to stay with a relative during childbirth.

In adjoining Morigaon district's Kasakhila village, aerially 60 km northwest of Birsingi, 17-year-old Mamoni Biswas (name changed) wished she had listened to her parents to wait till her Class 12 exams to be with her boyfriend Prasenjit Mandal. About nine months ago, she skipped school near her village and walked 3 km to daily-wager Prasenjit's house. They were later married at a local temple.

On February 3, the police picked up 23-year-old Prasenjit leaving a pregnant Mamoni distraught and her mother-in-law worried about her son's future. "I still don't understand why my son has been arrested for marrying the girl he loves," she said.

At No. 2 Kosutoli in Morigaon district, almost equidistant from Birsingi and Kasakhila, Hafiz Mujibur Rahman has become the most hated person overnight. The local kazi or civil judge following the Muslim personal law, he has been absconding since the Assam Police launched the crackdown against child marriage on February 3.

"My brother, Badrul Hasan, was arrested five days ago because the kazi erred ... registered his wife's age wrongly. And he took ₹7,000 for the nikaah to put us in trouble," Monjul Hasan, a commercial vehicle driver, said.

The 22-year-old Badrul, also a driver, had eloped with the girl he loved almost a year ago. His family got in touch with the girl's parents in the neighbouring Samatapathar village, traced the runaway couple and made the girl return home as she was a couple of months shy of turning 18 years old. The two were reunited after she was 15 days past the official age of adulthood. "But the kazi not only got her name wrong, he put a wrong birth date that made her a minor by two days. He has fudged dates of a few others in the village too. If the police don't get him, we will," Monjul said.

The police arrested 17 men from No. 2 Kosutoli and Samatapathar. They included the husbands of minor girls and their fathers.

Planned exercise

Announcing the crackdown on February 2, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the police had collected data for three years from 2020 and registered 4,074 cases across the State. He said the drive against child marriages since 2022 was demonstrative, indicating that the offenders could be released on bail soon.

Assam's Director-General of Police, Gyanendra Pratap Singh, said the exercise was planned after the Chief Minister sought action against large-scale child marriages two months ago. Singh said the shake-up was bound to have some social cost, but the State government has directed the District Magistrates and the Social Welfare Department to take care of girls married off at a young age with some of them already having given birth.

Till February 9, the police had arrested 2,763 persons, 58 of them from within the urban limits of Guwahati. More than 80 of the arrested for abetment were women. The Chief Minister cited the National Family Health Survey-5 report for 2019-21 to justify the drive against child marriage. The report said in India, 23.3% of women aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18, a drop from 27% in 2015-16. While West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura topped the list with 40% of such cases, Assam clocked 31.8%.

Seeking the cooperation of the people in “controlling this harmful trend”, the Chief Minister said the fight against the “social crime” of child marriage would continue till the 2026 Assembly election. “Teenage pregnancy accounted for 16.8% of more than 6.2 lakh pregnancies in Assam in 2022. We have to continue the drive until the objective is fulfilled,” he said.

In Kamrup district’s Pub Naitor village, about 115 km west of No. 2 Kosutoli, village defence party (VDP) member Taijuddin Sheikh had his second brush with the law when the police arrested his elder brother, Tajmohal Hoque, after not finding the latter’s son, Jubbar, at home. Jubbar was arrested on February 3 under Sections 6 (sexual assault) and 17 (punishment for abetment) of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012, read with relevant sections of the Prevention of Child Marriage (PCMA) Act, 2006 for marrying a 17-year-old girl four months ago.

“We erred in not checking documents when the girl’s parents said she was a praptabayashka (adult). We should have learnt a lesson when a neighbour dragged me to court in 2021 for marrying off our allegedly minor niece, whose documents convinced the judge that she was not a minor,” Taijuddin, a farmer, said.

Many in Pub Naitor protested when the police arrested Tajmohal and two others in separate cases. The murmurs began dying down when the villagers learned “we were not the only ones at the receiving end”. The situation has been similar further west in Dhubri, a district often equated with alleged “illegal immigration” from adjoining Bangladesh because of a Muslim population of 79.67% (Census 2011). “We arrested 182 people from February 3-9, and there has been no law and order issue after the initial outburst. In fact, the people are now informing us about child marriages in their areas and cases are being registered accordingly,” Dhubri’s Superintendent of Police, Aparna Natarajan, said.

Detained in transit camps

All those arrested in Dhubri and elsewhere in the Brahmaputra Valley have been sent to judicial custody at the Matia transit camp in Goalpara which was set up for housing up to 3,000 people declared foreigners by designated courts. In southern Assam’s Barak Valley, the premises of the National Automotive Testing and R&D Infrastructure Project have been turned into a temporary prison for child marriage offenders.

Since January 2017, when we took a resolution to make awareness against child marriage at all meetings, we have stopped 3,631 child marriages with the help of the local authorities. We have also put kazis behind bars and taken action against one of our leaders accused of indulging in child marriage,” Minnatul Islam, general secretary of the All Assam Minority Students’ Union, said.

‘Execution should have been better’

Rejaul Karim Sarkar, the union’s president, said members of the organisation have endured attacks and abuses for trying to campaign against child marriages and stop them. “This is a much-needed drive but the execution could have been better with a plan in place, ensuring girls under 18 years are not considered a burden for the poor. Many are clueless about laws of any kind,” he said. He also said the move would have been more effective had action been taken against police and other departmental officials in areas where child marriages are reported. “Otherwise, the exercise may boomerang and be prone to politicisation,” he said.

Aminul Islam, general secretary of the minority-based All India United Democratic Front, insisted they have not been politicising or communalising the drive. “We want child marriages to stop, but the action with retrospective effect is affecting lives. One also has to remember rules to implement the PCMA have not been framed in Assam,” he said.

Questions have also been raised over categorising the girls married off into two groups — below 14 years and from 14-18 years for booking the people involved under the POCSO Act and the PCMA respectively. “As we understand, no such categorisation is possible under POCSO, especially after the Supreme Court’s judgment of October 2017 upholding every girl’s right to bodily dignity and ruling that sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, who is below 18 years, is rape,” Rafiqul Islam of the Barpeta-based Campaign Against Child Marriage said. The court read down Exception 2 to Section 375 (rape) of the Indian Penal Code, which allowed the husband of a girl child between 15 and 18 years of age to have non-consensual sex with her.

Legal experts are raising questions about how the court would interpret the implementation, particularly in the case of Muslims who follow the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act of 1937 and the Assam Moslem Marriages and Divorces Registration Act of 1935, which do not bar girls under 18 years from getting married.

“There may be no complications for Hindus, Christians and people of other faiths as far as PCMA is concerned. The PCMA is not a settled law and is subject to interpretation by the court in the case of Muslims for whom the personal law is applicable. What if a boy arrested under PCMA goes to court saying as a Muslim, he is an adult under the Shariat law to marry? The court’s view would be interesting since we do not have a uniform civil code,” Fazluzzaman Mazumder, a Gauhati High Court lawyer, said. He suggested high-level discussions involving legal experts for a feasible solution. The Supreme Court is slated to examine whether girls as young as 15 can enter into wedlock if their personal law allows it but is an offence in statutory law. In India, the legal age for marriage is 18 years for women and 21 years for men. A parliamentary standing committee is also deliberating on the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which sought to amend the PCMA to increase the minimum age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years.

Stopping child marriage

Rafiqul Islam said child marriage is prevalent among many communities in Assam but is higher among the predominantly Muslim dwellers of the chars (shifting sandbars in the Brahmaputra) and the Adivasi tea plantation workers divided into Hindus and Christians.

“Our sustained efforts to advise people against child marriage for more than a decade may have stopped social ceremonies, but led to formalities indoors, often disguised as family get-togethers. What we wanted for years found a shortcut through the Chief Minister but the hard approach should go alongside softer measures such as ensuring livelihood and the Right to Education from Class 8 to Class 12 so that girls are not forced to drop out of schools,” he said.

Binod Deka, a social worker based in Morigaon district’s Mayong, agreed. “I think people will take us more seriously now,” he said.

Convincing tea plantation workers has been an uphill task, admitted Mansuk Sankharika, publicity secretary of the Baksa district unit of the All-Adivasi Students Association of Assam. “Earlier, the police

did not act upon complaints. Things seem to have changed after a 16-year-old pregnant girl was taken to a shelter home and the parents of her absconding husband, living in the Fatehabad Tea Estate, were jailed. Hopefully, the fear factor would help us do our awareness programmes with more authority,” he said.

Child rights activists said the crackdown did not happen in a day although the initial mass outrage could not have been avoided given the scale of the social malaise and the sudden impact on lives. They point to the Arundhati scheme the Assam government had launched in 2020 entailing 1 tola (11.66 grams) of gold to brides belonging to all communities provided they have attained the legal age of 18 years through verification of birth certificate and medical examination, and their marriage is registered. The scheme was for people with an annual income of below ₹5 lakh.

“The drive has without doubt set accountability to the law but child marriage does not happen only because the law does not respond to you. There have been cases of 70-year-old men marrying minors but it is important to note that the reason behind child marriage in most cases is romantic relationships that families often do not accept for fear of earning social shame. There should be conversations around the causes of child marriage and effects of the action against it with communities, which can go a long way in minimising public outcry,” Miguel Das Queah, child rights activist and founder of Universal Team for Social Action and Help, said.

Sunita Changkakati, Chairperson of the Assam State Commission for Protection of Child Rights, blamed most of the recent cases on access to mobile phones for online learning during the COVID-19 lockdown. Child marriage cases increased with boys and girls first meeting on social media platforms.

“A strong message needed to be sent but the scenario is worse than the data the police are armed with because many cases of child marriage go unreported and there is also the issue of teenage abortions. The crackdown would not have been necessary had the stakeholders – the district child protection officer under the Social Welfare Department, police, doctors, health workers, panchayat leaders, village headmen and public representatives – worked in coordination. A system taken for granted has been jolted; we need to sustain it through coordination,” she said.



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सबूत देने की बाध्यता से संसद अर्थहीन हो जाएगी

संपादकीय

प्रजातंत्र की सफलता की पहली शर्त है 'गवर्नेंस बाय डिस्कशन'। जन-विमर्श और उसका सरकारों द्वारा सम्मान स्वस्थ शासन की बुनियाद है। संसद के अस्तित्व के पीछे भी यही मूल कारण है। यहां जनमत से चुने गए सत्तापक्ष और विपक्ष

के प्रतिनिधि मुद्दों पर चर्चा करते हैं, जिनमें सरकार की नीतियों व कामकाज भी प्रमुख रूप से शामिल हैं। फिर मीडिया उन्हें लोक-विमर्श के धरातल तक पहुंचाता है और तब विभिन्न पहलुओं पर जनता सरकार के बारे में अपनी राय बनाती है। संसद में कांग्रेस के नेताओं ने अदाणी प्रकरण से संबंधित कई सवाल उठाए और आरोप लगाए। ये आरोप सदनों की कार्यवाही से इस आधार पर निकाल दिए गए कि वे बगैर किसी प्रूफ के थे। संसद कोई कोर्ट नहीं है। यहां की चर्चा कोर्ट की कार्यवाही से अलग होती है। अगर आरोप लगाने वाले से सबूत मांगा जाने लगा तो उस दिन से संसदीय प्रजातंत्र के अस्तित्व पर ही प्रश्न खड़ा हो जाएगा। विपक्ष सरकार की नीतियों पर लगातार सवाल खड़ा करता है और जनता उन पर अपनी राय नाती है। अगर वह राय प्रबल हुई तो सरकारें संशोधन करती हैं। ऐसे आरोपों पर यह सत्तापक्ष के हित में होगा कि सम्यक जांच के लिए सदन में बेबाक चर्चा करे। कार्यवाही से इस तरह चंद चीजें हटा देना अच्छी परिपाटी नहीं है।

जनसत्ता

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पलायन के पीछे

संपादकीय

यह किसी भी देश के लिए अच्छी बात नहीं मानी जाती कि उसके नागरिक दूसरे देशों की नागरिकता लेने को विवश हों। विदेश मंत्री ने संसद में लिखित जवाब देते हुए बताया कि पिछले बारह सालों में कुल सोलह लाख तिरसठ हजार चार सौ चालीस लोग भारतीय नागरिकता छोड़ कर दूसरे देशों में जा बसे हैं। इन सालों में हर साल एक लाख से अधिक लोगों ने देश छोड़ा। सबसे अधिक पिछले साल- सवा दो लाख से अधिक लोग भारत की नागरिकता छोड़ कर दूसरे देशों में बस गए। इन लोगों ने कारोबार या नौकरी के लिए अपने देश की नागरिकता छोड़ दी। हमारे देश में चूंकि दोहरी नागरिकता का प्रावधान नहीं है, इसलिए जो लोग दूसरे देशों में बस जाते हैं, उनकी नागरिकता स्वतः समाप्त हो जाती है। मगर तथ्य यह भी है कि दूसरे देशों की नागरिकता लेना भी इतना आसान नहीं है कि जो चाहे, वही उन देशों में जाकर बस जाए। भारत छोड़ने वालों से सबसे अधिक लोगों ने अमेरिका की नागरिकता ली है। वहां की नागरिकता हासिल करने के लिए लाखों भारतीय जद्दोजहद कर रहे हैं, नौकरी चली जाने के बाद उन्हें वापस आने के अलावा कोई और रास्ता नहीं बचता। जाहिर है, ऐसे लाखों लोग मजबूरी में भारत के नागरिक बने हुए हैं।

हकीकत यह है कि हमारे देश से बहुत सारे विद्यार्थी पढ़ाई करने के लिए दूसरे देशों का रुख करते हैं। फिर वहीं वे कोई नौकरी करके बस जाते हैं। इसी तरह बहुत सारे लोग कारोबार के सिलसिले में दूसरे देशों की नागरिकता ले लेते हैं। तथ्य तो यह भी है कि बहुत सारे ऐसे कारोबारियों ने दूसरे देशों की नागरिकता ले ली, जिनका भारत में जमा-जमाया कारोबार था। कुछ समय से यह चिंता भी जताई जा रही है कि कारोबारियों के इस तरह पलायन से देश की अर्थव्यवस्था पर प्रतिकूल प्रभाव पड़ेगा। इस बात से इनकार नहीं किया जा सकता कि हमारे देश के कई हिस्सों और तबकों में विदेश जाकर नौकरी या कारोबार करना और फिर वहीं बस जाना प्रतिष्ठा की बात मानी जाती है। यह भी ठीक है कि नौकरी के सिलसिले में विदेश गए लाखों भारतीय यहां भारी मात्रा में विदेशी मुद्रा भेजते हैं, जिससे सरकार का खजाना भरता है।

मगर यह प्रश्न अनुत्तरित है कि आखिर लोगों के सामने ऐसी स्थिति ही क्यों आती है कि उन्हें अपने देश की नागरिकता छोड़ कर पराई जमीन पर जा बसना ज्यादा सुरक्षित जान पड़ता है।

दरअसल, शिक्षा और रोजगार के माकूल अवसर उपलब्ध न होने के कारण लाखों विद्यार्थी हर साल देश छोड़ने पर मजबूर होते हैं। आंकड़े गवाह हैं कि भारतीय संस्थानों से जितने विद्यार्थी हर साल तकनीकी शिक्षा प्राप्त कर बाहर निकलते हैं, उनमें से बमुश्किल एक तिहाई को सम्मानजनक नौकरी मिल पाती है। वेतन आदि के मामले में भी यहां नौकरीशुदा लोगों की स्थिति असंतोषजनक ही है। ऐसे में विदेश पढ़ने गए विद्यार्थी यहां वापस लौटना ही नहीं चाहते। यही हाल कारोबारियों का है। सरकार कारोबार के लिए चाहे जितनी अनुकूल स्थितियां बनाने का प्रयास करती हो, मगर हकीकत यही है कि निवेश और आय का अनुपात सदा अनिश्चित बना रहता है। कारोबार के लिए सुरक्षित वातावरण होता, तो वे अपना देश छोड़ कर कभी न जाते। इसलिए इस तरह अपने देश के संसाधनों का उपयोग कर कौशल अर्जित करने के बाद लोगों का दूसरे देशों में जाकर बसना सरकार के लिए इस दिशा में नए सिरे से सोचने की जरूरत रेखांकित करता है।



Date: 11-02-23

बढ़ा परदेश का मोह

संपादकीय

दुनिया में भारतीय समुदाय बढ़ता जा रहा है, लेकिन जिस तरह बढ़ रहा है उसे उत्साहजनक कहना तो कतई ठीक नहीं होगा। वस्तुस्थिति यह है कि वर्तमान में भारतीय नागरिकों में देश छोड़ने की होड़ सी लगी है, जो कतई अच्छा समाचार नहीं है। सरकारने बृहस्पतिवार को राज्य सभा में जो जानकारी दी है। उसके अनुसार 2011 से 16 लाख से अधिक लोगों ने भारतीय नागरिकता छोड़ दी है। इनमें से सर्वाधिक 2,25,620 भारतीयों ने तो पिछले साल ही नागरिकता को तिलांजलि दी है। विदेश मंत्री एस जयशंकर ने वर्ष वार भारतीय नागरिकता छोड़ने वाले लोगों का ब्योरा रखा है। जिस गति से लोग नागरिकता छोड़ रहे हैं वह देश के लिए अच्छा संकेत नहीं है। वर्ष 2016 में 1,41,603 लोगों ने नागरिकता छोड़ी जबकि 2017 में 1,33,049 लोगों ने नागरिकता छोड़ी। साल 2018 में यह संख्या 1,34,561 थी, जबकि 2019 में 1,44,017, 2020 में 85,256 और 2021 में 1,63,370 भारतीयों ने अपनी नागरिकता छोड़ दी थी। वर्ष 2022 में यह संख्या 2,25,620 हो चुकी थी। जयशंकर ने उन 135 देशों की सूची भी सामने रखी, जिनकी नागरिकता भारतीयों ने हासिल की है। बेहतर जीवन की तलाश में विदेश जाने वालों को वहां पहुंचकर सुख सुविधाएं ही मिलती हों इसका कोई अध्ययन तो उपलब्ध नहीं है लेकिन ऐसे वक्त में जब भारत निरंतर विकास की ओर उन्मुख है और जब भारत वैश्विक समस्याओं को सुलझाने में निर्णायक भूमिका में आता जा रहा है यह प्रव्रजन ठीक नहीं है। जिस समय दुनिया के देश भारत की ओर उम्मीद भरी नजरों से देख रहे हैं और हमारे लोग स्वदेश छोड़ रहे हैं, यह गंभीर मसला है। जिन देशों में सर्वाधिक भारतीय जाना पसंद करते हैं वे सभी आर्थिक मंदी से जूझ रहे हैं। हाल के महीनों में अमेरिकी कंपनियों द्वारा

पेशेवरों की छंटनी एक बड़ा मुद्दा बनी है, जिससे सरकार भी भली भांति अवगत है। इस छंटनी में एक निश्चित प्रतिशत एच-1बी और एल 1 वीजा धारक भारतीय नागरिकों के होने की संभावना है। भारत सरकार अमेरिकी सरकार के समक्ष आईटी पेशेवरों सहित उच्च कुशल श्रमिकों से संबंधित मुद्दों को लगातार उठा रही है। स्थिति को देखते हुए यह कहा जा सकता है कि सरकार को इस दिशा में और गंभीर हो जाना चाहिए।

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खनिज धातु लिथियम भंडार का मिलना इतना अहम क्यों

शाशांक शेखर, (प्रोफेसर, दिल्ली यूनिवर्सिटी)



जम्मू-कश्मीर में एक बड़े लिथियम भंडार की खोज काफी महत्वपूर्ण है। ऐसा पहली बार हुआ है कि अपने देश में लिथियम की इतनी बड़ी मात्रा एक जगह मिली है। भारतीय भूवैज्ञानिक सर्वेक्षण के मुताबिक, जम्मू-कश्मीर के रियासी जिले के सलाल-हैमाना क्षेत्र में लिथियम का जो भंडार मिला है, वह करीब 59 लाख टन हो सकता है। लिथियम नॉन फेरस, यानी अलौह धातु है, और जब हम हरित ऊर्जा की बात कहते हैं या कार्बन क्रेडिट या फिर जलवायु परिवर्तन की, तो लिथियम ही वह धातु है, जिसका इस्तेमाल इलेक्ट्रिक गाड़ियों, स्मार्टफोन, सोलर पैनल और कंप्यूटर आदि की बैटरी के रूप में होता है। कार्बन-उत्सर्जन कम करने के लिए हमें

आने वाले दिनों में 20-30 प्रतिशत निजी और सरकारी गाड़ियों को इलेक्ट्रिक बनाना होगा। ऐसे में, लिथियम का यह भंडार हमारे लिए कितना कारगर हो सकता है, यह कोई छिपा रहस्य नहीं है।

फिलहाल दुनिया में कुछ देश ही लिथियम का उत्पादन अच्छी मात्रा में करते हैं। इन देशों में चिली, अर्जेंटीना, ऑस्ट्रेलिया, चीन जैसे देश शामिल हैं। हम अपनी जरूरत का लिथियम पूरी तरह से आयात करते हैं। न सिर्फ इलेक्ट्रिक कार की, बल्कि लैपटॉप और स्मार्टफोन की बैटरी अब लिथियम से ही बनने लगी है। हालांकि, इसका कुछ हद तक धातु उद्योग या रासायनिक उद्योग में भी इस्तेमाल होता है और दवा उद्योग में भी, लेकिन इनमें काफी कम मात्रा की जरूरत पड़ती है। इसलिए भारतीय भू-वैज्ञानिक सर्वेक्षण की सराहना की जा रही है, क्योंकि उसने अपने खनन कार्य को लेकर नई रणनीति अपनाई और पारंपरिक धातु अथवा खनिज की खोजबीन न करके सामरिक दृष्टि से काफी अहम इस

दुर्लभ धातु की खोज का बीड़ा उठाया। हालांकि, अगर यह पूछा जाए कि क्या कल से ही इसके खनन का कार्य शुरू हो सकता है? तो इसका जवाब है, नहीं। फिलहाल यह 'इंफर्ड रिसोर्सेज' है, यानी अभी सब कुछ अनुमानित है। सीमित भू-वैज्ञानिक साक्ष्य और नमूने के आधार पर इसकी मात्रा व ग्रेड का अनुमान लगाया गया है। इसकी गुणवत्ता और ग्रेड अभी तक प्रमाणित नहीं की जा सकी है। इसमें अभी कुछ वक्त लगेगा। यही कारण है कि अभी यह कहना भी जल्दबाजी होगी कि इस भंडार के मिलने के बाद लिथियम को लेकर ऑस्ट्रेलिया या अर्जेंटीना जैसे देशों पर हमारी निर्भरता खत्म हो जाएगी। जब तक यह आकलन नहीं हो जाता कि किस तकनीक से हम इसे निकालेंगे या हमारी क्षमता कितनी है, तब तक हम खाली हाथ ही माने जाएंगे। हां, अगर सब कुछ योजनागत हुआ, तो मुमकिन है कि लिथियम को लेकर दूसरे देशों पर हमारी निर्भरता काफी हद तक कम हो जाए।

नवीनतम आंकड़े बताते हैं कि साल 2020-21 में 173 करोड़ रुपये मूल्य के लिथियम और 8,811 करोड़ रुपये मूल्य के लिथियम ऑयन का आयात हमने हांगकांग, चीन, इंडोनेशिया और वियतनाम जैसे देशों से किया था। मुमकिन है, आने वाले दिनों में यह तस्वीर बदलती दिखे।

एक बात और। चिली, अर्जेंटीना जैसे देशों में, जहां लिथियम पर्याप्त मात्रा में उपलब्ध है, वहां जमीन के अंदर खारे पानी से इसे निकाला जाता है। इस पानी में छह से सात फीसदी तक ही लिथियम होता है। मगर अपने यहां यह धातु कुछ पत्थरों में देखी गई है। चूंकि लिथियम बहुत दुर्लभ धातु है, इसलिए कहने की आवश्यकता नहीं कि खनन की बेहतर तकनीक से अपने यहां इसका अच्छा उत्पादन हो सकता है।

विकास का आज जो पैमाना बन गया है, उसमें उस देश का कद स्वाभाविक रूप से बढ़ जाता है, जिसके पास लिथियम जैसे दुर्लभ धातु की बहुतायत हो। इससे सोलर तकनीक में आत्मनिर्भरता आती है, जो भारत के लिए काफी अहम साबित हो सकता है। इसका अर्थ है कि इस भंडार की प्राप्ति से अंतरराष्ट्रीय मंचों पर भारत का कद ऊंचा उठा है। खबर यह भी है कि अपने देश में यह बॉक्साइड में पाया गया है। चूंकि भारत में बॉक्साइड के रिजर्व कई जगहों पर हैं, इसलिए जम्मू-कश्मीर की सफलता अन्य तमाम रिजर्व के लिए संभावना पैदा कर रही है। अगर अन्य जगहों पर भी तलाश की जाए, तो मुमकिन है, लिथियम की बड़ी मात्रा हमारे हाथ लगे। इससे कम से कम लिथियम में 'आत्मनिर्भर भारत' की ओर हम जरूर बढ़ सकेंगे।