



EDITORIAL

Dissent in Democracy: The Demand of the Day

JNANADEEPA
P-ISSN 0972-3331
23/1 Jan-June 2019: 5-10

Jnanadeepa : Pune Journal of Religious Studies 23/1

DISSENT IN DEMOCRACY

THE DEMAND OF THE DAY

Dr. Victor Ferrao, Rachol Seminary, Goa, delivered the keynote address, “(Un) Democratising Democracy”, in which, he highlighted the need for an open mind to accept constructive criticism which is unfortunately disappearing in our present Indian society. In the efforts to focus upon uniformity instead of unity the spirit of intolerance is dangerously on the increase. If someone is critical towards the majority and dares to think differently he or she is branded as ‘anti-national’. Everyone is forced to think along the same lines and therefore “All dissent is viewed as anti-national. The sense and the nonsense of this politics of anti-nationalism lies

in a dislocated sense of insecurity acutely felt by the one who feels the need to make a public claim of purity of one's nationalism". He elaborates on some of the painful and unhealthy practices and events that take place which pose a serious threat to democracy. He finally calls for a serious introspection and invites all the people of good will to join together to restore democracy, peace and harmony in our nation: "(Un)democratising of democracy in our country is gaining momentum by the day. We have slipped into undeclared state of emergency. Can we diagnose this painful condition or shall we stay mum numbed by the intoxication of nationalism or the oedipal response triggered by the fear the very goons that are actively destroying our democracy".

Though it is the general opinion that St. Paul is a traditionalist or a conformist who supports the status quo unquestioningly, yet, as **Dr. Paul Raj**, in his exposition on "I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phi 3:8): Paul's Radical Dissent with the Past Life Based on the Law", argues that there are in fact a number of stories about his life and mission which demonstrate that he was also a person of strong dissent to many elements that came across in his life. Paul undoubtedly challenged the legalistic attitude of the Jews, as Jesus did against the Pharisees and their legalistic approach to life. Paul was determined to follow Jesus in every aspect including his boldness and readiness to challenge the meaningless traditions. However Paul was cautious and wise: "While remaining faithful to the elements that were common to his old and new ways of life, for example accepting the fact that both the testaments speak of the one and the same God, he boldly questioned and rejected his learned traditions that contradicted his new experience considering them as either meaningless or redundant." At the same time he has also successfully integrated from his past life and background whatever was supportive of his new experience and life." The author, thus, argues that Paul's dissent was not reckless, nor just for the sake of dissenting, but it was constructive and well-calculated, from which we have much to learn.

Dr. Stephen Chundamthadam, SJ, in his "Democracy and Vigilantism: An analytical study of Indian democracy with reference

to Rājadharmā in the Manusmṛiti and the Republic of Plato,” attempts to bring in the two separate worlds of Manusmṛiti and Plato. He begins with the short description of the painful scenario of atrocities meted out against the minorities and how Dalits, especially Dalit women, are treated inhumanly in the country, which though takes pride in being the largest democratic country in the world. He argues that as we have selfish leaders without a vision for the country the Helpless masses and the cry for justice; he points out the need for ethical values and the guiding principles for political leaders and the administrative structures which usually turn out to be unjust and oppression. As rulers and policy makers are responsible for the welfare and happiness of the people they need to be people of honesty and integrity. Democracy may be, as Winston Churchill puts it, the worst form of government but we are not left with better options either. If the government goes to the corrupted and inhuman hands the masses have to suffer for a considerable time before any good change occurs in but the present ruling powers can get so powerful that they make sure to come back to power by any hook or crook. The author complains that the present leaders in our country are more interested in their own well-being and prosperity, rather than that of the people and they act against the rājadharmā and against the fundamental principles of democracy. Nevertheless he ends with the hope that “there will emerge leaders like Jayprakash Narayan who sacrificed his life for the cause of democracy and freedom. At the appropriate time people will respond creatively and genuine leaders will emerge to articulate the resentment of the people and to take up on themselves the agony and suffering of the people. To strengthen such a move we need to have the courage to take a stand with the oppressed and the suffering.”

It is natural that we differ from one another in our thinking and assessment. It is not an exception therefore to have different sets of values, approaches, belief-systems and so on. But human society is not possible if we don't live together in harmony. Differences on the one hand and the need for togetherness on the other hand seem to be two sides of the same coin. We need to live with each other to make our lives not only worth-the-while, but also even to make it possible; because we have different thinking capacities and

interests we are bound to disagree with each other and therefore the need is felt to give serious consideration to the dissenting voices; and finally we all are called to improve upon the society in holistic manner where not only the human society but also the whole environment is given their due importance. Therefore, **Prof. Nishant A. Irudayadason**, in his paper on “With, Against and for the Other”, reflects along these lines and offers his insights for “everyone who wishes to care for the other. Our call is to dissent to anything that might hinder the flourishing of human ideals. ‘With the other’ is the good will to be part of a social and political co-living. ‘Against the other’ expresses the inevitability of conflict and dissent. ‘For the other’ is the reason for which dissent becomes necessary.”

Dr. Arjen Tete SJ, in his paper, “Resisting Cultural Genocide”, powerfully brings out the dangerous and anti-poor nexus between the corporate world and the policy-makers in politics. As the adivasis are generally powerless in several fronts they are easily intimidated when they dare to come up with dissenting voices. The author cautions that their genuine protests, cries for their rights and demands for listening ears cannot be easily annihilated and there may be a big upsurge coming from within Adivasi communities. These communities look at lands not just as their properties and means of livelihood, but as the very cultural and existential identities. It affects their attitudes, values and way of life, and therefore when their land is forcefully taken away to be destroyed in the name of development, their very identity and existence are challenged. He elaborates on the current situation of land alienation and displacement and the tribals’ resistance for their very survival. He calls for a ‘radical ecological democracy’. The author argues that the tribals’ reverential attitude towards nature and their cautious care in utilizing the natural resources, just for their survival rather than for their greed, teach the modern society a great lesson on democratic ecology: “They [the tribals] register a powerful protest against a wasteful lifestyle devoid of any sense of responsibility to the world of nature. Tribal resistance in central states of India is for radical ecological democracy which is an alternative path to inclusive and sustainable development”.

One of the minority sections that are forgotten or deliberately neglected in our society is the group of “LGBTQ” - gays, lesbians, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community. Their voices and concerns are often taken into any consideration at all. **Dr. Konrad Noronha SJ**, analyses some of their concerns in his “Fractured Identities, Invisible Selves”. He argues that their rights are denied because of social taboos and cultural hangovers. This unhealthy treatment by the society in general affects those sections of people very badly, even to the extent of shaping their attitudes towards life, God, society, religion and so on. Counselors require special training to deal with such clients to understand them and to deal with their real issues of life. These people’s genuine problems and apprehensions demand a sympathetic hearing and constructive efforts are to be taken to make them acceptable in the main stream of the society. The author opines that the “Improvement or failure depends on the therapeutic relationship and the type of therapy used because therapies can be used appropriately as well as badly. This implies educating counselors in working with LGBTQI clients. Community resources too form an important part of the assessment of any client as community impacts treatment and any counseling work done with an LGBTQI client. A counselor must build on the capacity to solve problems, increase strengths, must be community driven, and must emphasize the assets of the client and the community. This would help tremendously in giving a variety of clients a holistic approach towards treatment.”

Prof. S. Stephen Jayard in his paper, “Dissent: A Demand for Ascent - An Essential Lesson from the Existential Nature of Science”, likes to look at the whole issue from the perspectives of Philosophy of Science. Amidst all the millions of species since the beginning of the Universe, we are, at least as far as we know today, the only ‘thinking’ beings; this thinking has to be nourished and encouraged so that the whole humanity gets enhanced. Respecting the diverse thinking and methods is essential as reality is too vast to be comprehended by one single method or mode of thinking. Therefore, “To curtail one’s thinking and force one to act only in certain manner would actually be a great disservice, not only to the individual concerned, but also to the whole of humanity; applying the same mould of thinking and acting to everyone in society will

lead humanity to a stunted growth and land it in stable waters.” This necessitates dissenting voices in our society. Science is, perhaps, the first discipline to realize not to absolutize any one perspective; there is always much to learn, not only from others but also from one’s own mistakes; “after all we can never know how much we don’t know and all that we know is what we know.” The paper argues, with examples from different sectors, that blind adherence to the powers and failure to allow diverse perspectives are dangerous to the growth of science and the welfare of the society in general. As Albert Einstein is convinced that “Blind belief in authority is the greatest enemy of truth.” The paper, further, attempts to explain how dissent in science is essential because of the very nature of science, by focusing on three important aspects: the nature of human reasoning, method of science and theory choice. Thus the paper argues that science teaches us a strong lesson in democracy that humanity cannot afford to ignore!

At the end of the deliberations on such a relevant and important theme the participants are deeply convinced of the need and relevance of informed dissent to strengthen our democracy to deepen our intellectual acumen / and to enhance the multifarious dimensions of our beloved nation. We wish and pray that our leaders, politicians, policy-makers and all the people of good-will put their minds and hearts together...

- To create an atmosphere of open and sympathetic dialogue where each and every one is given due respect and dignity in listening to one’s sincere viewpoints...
- To strive sincerely to enrich our society with renewed vigour and commitment to ensure that the multi-dimensional face of India is strengthened... and
- To work together to create unity, not uniformity to become the agents of the Holy Spirit in building up the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth.

Prof. S. Stephen Jayard

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