

Corruption Fight and Language of Indian State: A Tale of the Indian Public Sphere

LUTTE CONTRE LA CORRUPTION ET LA LANGUE DE L'ÉTAT INDIEN UN CONTE DE LA SPHERE PUBLIQUE INDIENNE

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Abstract

The fight against corruption has become an intrinsic aspect of Indian landscape. The movement remains more or less unorganised. Therefore, there is engagement of numerous individuals representing various ideological standpoints. One of the actors, who is a professional yoga practitioner and ideologically right winger, received initially warm welcome by Indian State. Due to failure of accord between the two, the state oppression unleashed against him. The kinds of language used by the Indian Government and ruling party against him would eventually strengthen the right wing tendencies in place of countering it in India.

Key words: Non-state actor; State actors; Misconstrual of politics; Patriarchal nuances; Public sphere

Résumé

La lutte contre la corruption est devenue un aspect intrinsèque du paysage indien. Le mouvement reste plus ou moins inorganisés. Par conséquent, il est l'engagement de nombreuses personnes représentant différents points de vue idéologiques. Un des acteurs, qui est un pratiquant du yoga professionnelle et l'aïlier idéologiquement à droite, a reçu un premier accueil chaleureux par l'État indien. En raison de l'échec de l'Accord entre les deux, l'oppression de l'État a déclenché contre lui. Les types de langage utilisé par le Parti et la décision du gouvernement indien contre lui serait éventuellement renforcer les tendances de droite au lieu de la contrer en Inde.

Mots clés: Des acteurs non étatiques; Les acteurs

étatiques; Le Misconstrual de la politique; Les nuances patriarcale; La sphère publique

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INTRODUCTION

India is on the threshold of many transfigurations. Since independence from the yoke of United Kingdom in 1947, she has witnessed many stages of political contestations, economic disparity and social unrest. In a way, India exhibits a curious case of institutional success in form of incessant democratic-electoral practices barring few exceptions like imposition of emergency by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi during 1975-77 along with abysmal failures to provide social and physical infrastructures. Constant failures of the ruling political class on latter issues have led to the development of 'pre-modern project whereby *babas/swamis* (godman) are becoming significant figures at the cost of constitutionally envisaged actors' (Patnaik, 2011:129-132).

Amidst high inflation, casualization of labour force and increased poverty, the movement against corruption, mainly led by non-political institutional actors, has acquired the cynosure status in India. At the outset, it was conceived that the efficaciousness of ruling class and Indian state would be shaken. Nonetheless, in the lexicon of state, an idea of 'perpetual suzerainty' looms large. Perpetual suzerainty can be defined as a realm of 'incessant' continuation of uninterrupted rule gained due to absence of incensed oppositions. Therefore, the natural corollary becomes impalement by the state even at the slightest of provocations by non-state actors. One of the non-political institutional actors, Ram Krishna Yadav

alias Ramdev also became a part of this unorganised movement. Upon his arrival to New Delhi, Indian government sent four cabinet ministers (Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee, Minister of Human Resource Kapil Sibal, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Pawan Kumar Bansal and Tourism Minister Subodh Kant Sahay) to receive him which was a rare gesture; even heads of states/governments are not entitled for this treatment. Eventually deal between the government and Ramdev remained inconclusive and abortive. This was followed by a massive crackdown by the Indian State on Ramdev and his followers assembled at Ramlila Ground (a ground in New Delhi wherein protests and rallies take place). The acts of benevolent and subsequently insane treatment, which were meted out, reveal the scheme of co-option and coercion. The limited scope of this article is to fathom the nature of the discourse of both the ruling party and the central government which has been continued after the procedural crackdown on passive conglomerates in the wee hours of June 5, 2011 at Ramlila Ground of New Delhi.

1. A NON-STATE ACTOR VERSUS STATE ACTORS

At the outset, there are two sine qua non issues before the citizenry of India: the role of state and non-state actors. The movement, continued from June 1 and supposed to have ended on June 6, 2011, was led by a non-state actor, a yoga practitioner known for his amassed property and eldritch remarks (on AIDS, Homosexuality and currency denominations) and eleemosynary reciprocal by the state actors. The engagement of state actor and a non-state actor was based on the politics of negotiation, co-option and coercion. The politics of negotiation lasted between the state apparatus and a non-state actor that is, an individual, for some time. This was a dangerous sign for democracy because open invitation for other claimants was foreclosed.

The politics of co-option and coercion did not yield much result. In fact, failure of accord between the two shows the pliable status of a non-state actor which believed in opaque endeavours in association with the state actor. It also exhibited invincibility of the state actors against a much hyped and powerful individual. Despite the temporal win by the state actors and the nature of non-state actor, the language permeating from the Congress party and state apparatus is worrisome in quantified manner. Indeed, more than success and failure by either one, the language which was used reflects the sordid state of affairs.

2. MISCONSTRUAL OF POLITICS

The obvious casualty in the whole exercise was the

preposterousness of the concept and practice of 'Politics'. If a non-state actor indulges in different forays, s/he is not supposed to cross the serene line of her/his occupation to embark on the realm of politics. According to one of the general secretaries of the Congress party, Digvijay Singh, "[i]f you want to teach yoga, I have no problem, but if you want to do politics, then join the fray" (Digvijay says RSS behind Ramdev's agitation, 2011, para. 3).

Following this formulation would lead to a dangerous insinuation and further the complication of idea and practice of 'politics'. The politics cannot be compartmentalised and therefore its creation as a specialised voyage is highly untenable proposition. This would leave a larger space from 'out of purview' of politics. Circumambulation of politics to merely election and political institutions on the one hand defies the broadening discernment of politics and on the other hand impedes the explication of intricacies of myriad domains. It is ironical that a non-state actor practicing 'yoga' and thereafter creating an empire is not 'politics' but mulling on diverse issues (which is linked with his first act) becomes politics.

This arbitrary division on part of the ruling party signals the 'return of conservatism' wherein various elements of lifeworld are segmented and assorted reactionary practices are being accepted at ease in the name of 'apolitical'. The farcical distinction between 'political' and 'apolitical' needs to be challenged tooth and nail to assert that the 'parts' are linked with the 'whole' and vice versa. Nothing is apolitical in the land of multitudinous contentions.

3. A RETURN OF REINFORCED PATRIARCHAL NUANCES

Alongside the 'politics', the category of 'women' is meted out a return of reinforced patriarchal nuances in the public sphere. Though patriarchal ethos were never absent from the circulation and practice in the Indian public sphere yet the recent development vociferously assert the intactness in toto. The harangued style of language used after the attempted flee of Ramdev is full of disparagement against women.

Ramdev attempted to flee in a woman's attire vainly when police did attempt to catch him. The subsequent comments are superciliousness. Janardan Dwivedi, a high powered general secretary of the Congress, squarely and unrepentantly stated that "[a]satyagrahi does not run away stealthily wearing women's dress. Satyagrahi is always ready to sacrifice his life" (Ramdev says history will not forgive Manmohan for "political sin", 2011, para. 7).

Paraphrasing of the barbed comment would mean that a satyagrahi could run away secretly sans a woman's attire. This attire has been attributed as a 'cowardice symbol'. The speaker of this statement glorifies an act of

person i.e. right to flee but vilifies the nature of an act. An act of male is justifiable but it becomes problematic when it turns out to be different in nature i.e. feminine. Moreover, imposition and circulation of 'nature' have roots in patriarchal structure. This has been ignored surreptitiously.

4. SERMONISATION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The nature of movement taking place in the public sphere is next victim in the vortex of this language insanity. The sermonisations of the public sphere and imposition through dictums have been a monopoly of right-wingers in democratic societies. Right-wingers have used a slew of symbolisation tactics to garner people's support. For example, right-wingers would campaign massively against those movements which are using progressive tenets in the public sphere. The progressive tenets could be massive demonstration of heretical practices. Dance could be one of heretical practices. Even dance by women is a catalytic act whereby tenets of orthodoxy get jolted.

Nevertheless, veracity and viability of such options have been shrugged off by the acts of Congress. The comment by Sushma Swaraj is telling one. Sushma Swaraj is opposition leader in the lower house of Indian parliament and represents the right wing Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). She is also infamous for her diabolic remark against Sonia Gandhi, president of the Congress party. Once she said that 'if Sonia Gandhi would become the prime minister, she would shave off her head and don a white saree and eat only channa (gram)' (Sharma, 2004). Shaving off head and donning a white saree in a brahminical led patriarchal system entails widowhood which is precarious condition for women.

A Congress response to Sushma Swaraj's dance at Rajghat, a place of M.K. Gandhi's Samadhi (memorial), is not a better one. The obvious relationship between Ramdev and right became publicly known when the BJP staged a *dharana* (sitting) on June 6, 2011 in favour of him and against police atrocities which led abrupt and forceful ending of his led movement on wee hours of June 5. Sushama Swaraj danced at this occasion and next day the public sphere was poured with the images of her in a dance pose.

The Congress party's response and remark was conforming the right-wing tendencies which were so far sui generis to the BJP and its branches. According to Digvijay Singh, "[t]he way in which party leaders [BJP leaders] breached the sanctity of Rajghat by dancing there is condemnable. The party should tender an apology to people. Yeh nachaniyon ki party kab se ho gayi (When did BJP become a party of dancers)? ("Sushma says she will dance again, Congress demands her resignation," 2011, para. 5). The similar congruity was repeated by another

general secretary of the Congress, B.K. Prasad. Prasad suggests that "[b]y dancing at the Samadhi of Mahatma Gandhi, Sushma Swaraj has not only insulted Gandhiji but all the freedom fighters and the entire countrymen. She should resign from the post of the Leader of the Opposition and apologise to the people" (Congress demands Sushma's resignation as Leader of Opposition, 2011, para. 2).

These appalling remarks suggest the constriction of movement in the public sphere in more than one ways. The term *nachaniyon* cannot be translated literally as dancers. It can be loosely interpreted as an act of dance by female folk. The term *nachaniya/nachaniyon* reminds one of the remnants of feudal vocabulary. In the courts of King/Feudal, the body of female, generally belonging to marginal classes and castes, was used in form of dance to entertain courtiers. The noble decree was enough to force women to perform for entertainment to avoid severity and social sanctions. To perform a dance for entertainment of courtiers was perceived inferior in contrast to *nritya*. The *nritya* was conceived as puritan dance used for devotional purposes. The Congress' comment does not obliterate the feudal vocab but has reinforced it. Ironically, the attack on a right wing party is not on philosophical ground but by usage of a tool of which they are also anathematical.

The movement or spontaneous protest in the public sphere, from the vantage point of margin, has to be different in all colours. Jürgen Habermas defines the vitality of the public sphere as a place wherein subjectivity of individuals gets transformed into collectivity to press the demands against the state (Habermas, 1987, 1988, 1989). So far so good. The problem occurs when Habermas lays down the standardisation of the language through which people will negotiate and arrive at consensus sans their empirical locations (Habermas, 1991, 1992). The critics have pointed out that universalisation of language and standardisation is not possible for the emancipation of marginals (Harvey, 2004: 353-354; Fraser, 1992).

The language of the Congress party vilifies both Habermasian concern and critics' concern. Usage of feudal vocab does not meet the criteria of standardisation of Habermas for emancipation. This standardisation is supposed to be free from all biases or at least overt disposition. From critics of Habermasian's vantage point, contemptuous remarks on dance or nachaniyan do not dissipate margins' concern because in place of vilifying the structure, the target is margin i.e. nachaniyan. Put differently, either way, the language of the Congress produces two implications. Firstly, the movement in the public sphere by the right wing has not been countered by the providing alternative vocab. Secondly, it reinforces the patches of feudal lexicon which has so far produced sardonic fear in all spheres.

CONCLUSION

The Indian public sphere has witnessed a tormented return of values which were always anathematical to the cause of deprived sections. The movement which was led by a yoga practitioner known for right-wing predilection demonstrated the callous remark in form of feudal vocab by the ruling echelons. In place of attacking the nature of movement, the ruling party at the Centre embarked on those tenets which were essentially used by the right-wingers to cement their position in Indian landscape. The concept of 'politics' has been wrongly defined. The language also reinforces the return of patriarchal values along with sermonisation of movement wherein language used goes against the emancipatory politics. During this period, government and the Congress reemphasised that vocab against the right-wing which in fact strengthen them.

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