

60 YEARS WORKING OF INDIAN PARLIAMENT: A TEMPLE OF DEMOCRACY

BAL RAM JAKHAR

Shri ShivrajPatil, His Excellency, the Governor of Punjab, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar, Hon'ble Member of Parliament; Dr. Subhash Kashyap, Former Secretary-General of Lok Sabha, Dr. D. Sundar Ram and Mrs. Bharathi Sundar, Founders of AGRASRI and Rajiv Rural Development Foundation, Invitees, Ladies and Gentlemen

My eyes become wet, the moment Rajiv Gandhi flashes in my memory. He was so very near and dear to me. His magnetising personal qualities of simplicity, smiling gesture and transparent conduct endeared whoever came in his contact. He was a born leader, he had not equipped leadership. I assess him as a statesman and not a politician.

On the occasion of celebrating his 68th birthday, I cannot resist myself mention a few of his contributions among many to nation, in a short span of his political life. Like Nehru Ji, he was a person with far-sighted vision and determined action to achieve the perceived goal. It a common knowledge that when he had proposed introduction of computerization in administration and business management sky-high, hue and cry was raised alleging that would lead mass unemployment of educated youth in the country. Not caring the criticisms, Rajiv introduced application computer systems in the country.

Today, we find that computerisation has become all pervasive. It has become essential input in industry, trade, agriculture, office administration, communication and where not? It has increased manifold operational efficiency. India has developed a competitive computer industry. Millions of new job opportunities have been created. In the field of agriculture he introduced concept of setting up technical 'missions' for specific crops, particularly, for deficit crops. He reviewed the utilisation of Government financial assistance to people under various scheme, he found to his dismay that only 15 paisa out of Rupee reached to the intended beneficiary.

He resolved to strengthen village Panchayat with more statutory administrative and financial powers. The 73rd and 74th amendment of constitution relating to Panchayats was his vision. In the field of politics, Rajiv made historical contribution that was the time when "Aya Ram and Gaya Ram" kept hanging a sword on the head of every Government. He enacted the "Anti-Defection Act". At international level, with his policy statements he had elevated himself to get applauses from all. In short, sacrifice of his life for the motherland is his greatest contribution. It is no exaggeration to say that in the post-Independence political history of India, he has unparallel place. Rajiv can be compared only with Rajiv. I offer my most affectionate tributes to him on his birth day.

■ Text of the *Eleventh Bharat Ratna Rajiv Gandhi Memorial Lecture*, delivered by **Dr. Bal Ram Jakhar**, Former Speaker of Lok Sabha and Former Governor of Madhya Pradesh, held on 20 August, 2012 at the Indian Institute of Public Administration Conference Hall, New Delhi, under the aegis of Academy of Grassroots Studies and Research of India (AGRASRI), Tirupati, in Collaboration with the Rajiv Rural Development Foundation (RRDF), Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh.

Friends! Now I take up the subject of today's lecture, namely "*60 Years of the Working of Indian Parliament: A Temple of Democracy*". Review of 60 years working of our Parliament is a wide subject, as it involves various angles. I confine myself only to the democratic aspect of its performances, as "*Temple of Democracy*". The first fundamental tenet and feature of democracy is observance of highest standard of discipline by all involve in it, namely, people, their representatives and their representative institutions at various levels. It necessitates appreciation of each other's view-points and arguments, mutual understanding, decisions by consensus etc. There is no place for obstinacy in democracy. In case there is no discipline, it will not be democracy, whatever else it may be. Adherence to discipline in democracy is as important and as in a temple. The code and conduct of a temple cannot be violated. That is the simple analogy to call the Parliament temple of democracy.

It is very interesting to study Parliament debates of the Houses, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. It is found, that gradually, orderly functioning based on principles of democracy deteriorating for several reasons. For want of time I would not like to refer to go into their details. For an audience like this, it is suffice to give an imitation.

I would also review of the qualitative function of the two Houses. The participation of representatives of political party's gives an impression as they were rivals to each other. It is against democracy. Earlier Parliament Sessions used to begin with scheduled business of the Houses. Now preparations are made to corner the Government. Various disruptions and walkouts were unknown during debates, now they have become characteristic of Parliament. At times, the Opposition does not allow any business, and whole session completes itself without conducting any business. To quote, the whole winter session of Parliament in 2010 could not conduct any business, when Opposition insisted on constitution of a committee to probe an alleged scam. Obstinacy is against democracy. Insignificant issues are raised and discussed for long time.

Friends, meaningful debates over marathon sessions have been few and far between in the last six decades. After 60 years, the question to ask is whether the debates in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha have adequately reflected the will of the people, whether the law-making powers of Parliament have contributed to the creation of a freer, fairer and more just society. We must deliberate on the highest priority basis why things have come to such a pass and what can be done to restore the legislatures and legislators to their old glory and bring about a renaissance of democratic faith and parliamentary culture. In today's situation, there is every case for appointment of a *Parliamentary Reforms Commission* or a *Study of Parliament Group* (as was done in the UK) to consider the various issues and policy options to make Parliament a more effective instrument of socio-economic development and national rejuvenation. What is needed is a full-scale review. The time has come for fundamental institutional changes and reforms in the working of Indian Parliament after the completion of 60 years of fruitful services to the people of India, as temple of democracy.

Parliament is "National Panchayat" charged with constitutional responsibility of welfare of the entire population. There is multiplicity of problems faced by people and the country. They need

more discussion to find solution. But recently number of sittings of Parliament had been curtailed. The predecessor President of Shri Pranab Mukherjee, Smt. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil in her farewell address to parliamentarians cautioned to MPs not to voice their dissensions in Parliament at the cost of serious debates and legislations. She added that at the end of the day, the worth value and respect of a legislature is judged by its output in terms of serious debate and legislations. The essence of her message and advice is make Parliament truly Temple of Democracy. Democracy is not mere electing people representatives. It is much more to ensure their purposeful democratic working.

Lastly, just giving of constitutional status to village Panchayat and empowering them with more powers is not enough. The functioning of Panchayats should become instrument for promotion social unity of village community. Nehru Ji emphasised de-political character of village Panchayats. AGRASRI may consider adopting one Panchayat to make it truly model.

Before concluding, I pay my humble and respectful homage to the late Shri Rajiv Gandhi, who laid the foundations for grassroots democracy through 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution for attaining the objective *power to the people*. I once again thank the Academy of Grassroots Studies and Research of India for according me this opportunity and honour to share with this august gathering my views on the working of Indian Parliament over six decades in our country. I wish them all success in their endeavors towards the furtherance of the high ideals and vision towards modern India which Shri Rajiv Gandhi cherished all through his public life.



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