
DEVELOPMENT FOR COMMON MEN-RHETORIC OR REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The word “common man” is the most used phrase by all political parties in India, with parties cutting across the political spectrum are using it to gain political currency. The common man may be described by different people differently, based on their ideology, perspective and context. Defining common man is even more difficult. The common man is “average citizen, as contrasted with the social, political or cultural elite and one who pays the taxes, demands that rule of law is enforced, and requires little from its government other than protection that would upset their lives. The source of political power is the common man, through whose vote, politician reach the ruling chair. As the common man has power to ascend the politician to political power, they also have power to dethrone the politician from power. The most visible amusement for the common man is the development mirror shown by politician to them from time to time. Development as understood by the common man is an integrated process of total change that is taking place within individuals, families, groups, rural and urban communities, nations and the world bringing about socio-economic and spiritual-cultural progress in one and all. The common man has no say in formation of grand plans made by bureaucrats and policy makers, sermons from moralizers, and goods and services from a market economy. In fact common man has no control at all over the ideas, technologies, strategies, and structures that are imposed upon them from outside. Development as practiced in post-independent India appears to be an elitist exercise which pushed common people to an increasing state of dependency and non-participation in decision- making processes which affect their lives. The common man with whose help political Masters moved upward, are busy in party politics, leaving little time for even thinking development or need of his constituents. The political masters become intoxicated with power and remain busy reaping that fruit of political power. Since in democracy the ultimate power rest with common man and if the common man organize themselves and raise his/her voice, no power can withstand them. They can place powerful people to insignificant positions. Therefore either the common man must raise his/her voice or the bureaucrats or Political Masters should take the initiative to reach the common man, not to control him but to liberate him, not to manipulate him but to make him participate as an equal, in defining goals, setting targets and implementing plans and to turn development for common man from Rhetoric to Reality.

Development for Common Men-Rhetoric or Reality

The word “common man” is the most used phrase by all political parties in India, with parties cutting across the political spectrum are using it to gain political currency. It is most likely to be in news, as every signal political party shall be uttering it, many times in the coming weeks, as India discusses its next budget for 2015-16. But what exactly is the meaning of common man or Aam Aadmi, as described in Hindi.

Now the question is: Is he the silent, mustachioed old man with a wisp of white hair, dressed in dhoti and jacket, such as the creation of Times of India cartoonist R.K.Laxman Or is he Budhiya Das Manikpuri, the hapless farmer in the movie “Peepli Live,” who finds himself considering suicide as an escape from the debt trap or is he one of the rural folk from India’s drought-stricken Bundelkhand region who arrives at Delhi’s Sarai Kale Khan bus terminal seeking employment in the big city. (1)

The common man may be described by different people differently, based on their ideology, perspective and context. The common man is a politician’s Hero, as around him, his entire gamut of politics revolves only in name. Defining common man is even more difficult. Common man is one who, “just survived a barrage of election manifestos and innovations in rhetoric. Politicians begged him and ripped their heart out to show his place there. Now they will forget him, only to remember five years later. It's not easy being a Common Man.”(2) Congress party during Jawahar Lal Nehru and Indira Gandhis era, meant, common man, as a member of the weaker sections of the society: Dalits, tribals and so on. Under Dr. Manmohan Singh Government, the Common Man represented anybody who is below upper middle class. As per the Marxist Party represented by CPI, the Common Man represents the toiling masses of this country. According to them, Common Man are the people, who have no source of income except their labour. Broadly, all those with income or standard of living below the national average are the Common Man. Basudeb Acharia, a Senior member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), defines the common man as “those who are below the poverty line. In India, common men are peasants, agricultural laborers and middle class who all constitute over 85% of the country’s population.”(3) The BJP says the Common Man is one who is not economically well off and is affected by even a slight change in prices. He doesn’t have access to good education, health and other such necessities. Nor does he have the money to pay for them. Prakash Javadekar said “common man is anybody who has a stake in the system but doesn’t have an effective say,” “mainly those in the unorganized sector and the marginalized sections of the society.”(4) Pratap Bhanu Mehta of the Centre for Policy Research and he

says the definition is not really clear. "It's a rhetorical invocation and has been kept vague precisely so that most people feel part of it."(5)

Thus the common man is "average citizen, as contrasted with the social, political or cultural elite."(6). He/she is the person who holds no title. As such, the common man is the most important man in society, he/she pays the taxes, demands that rule of law is enforced, and requires little from its government other than protection those that would upset their lives.

Since the primary goal of all political parties is to gain political power, so that, they can implement their development vision through proposed policies and programs. The source of political power is the common man, through whose vote, politician reach the ruling chair. As the common man has power to ascend the politician to political power, they also have power to dethrone the politician from power. If the common men organize themselves and raise his/her voice, no power can withstand them. They can place powerful people to insignificant positions. If common men roar, governments will fall. It is therefore imperative for political parties ascending to power, to amuse common man all the time, during their currency of power.

The most visible amusement for the common man is the development mirror shown by politician to them from time to time. Now the question is what development, the common man wants from its governments. Development as understood by the common man is an integrated process of total change that is taking place within individuals, families, groups, rural and urban communities, nations and the world bringing about socio-economic and spiritual-cultural progress in one and all. For common man development has not only a quantitative meaning but a qualitative meaning as well.

The development for common man is directly concerned with the satisfaction of his basic human needs. These are;- Adequate security, Affordable taxation, A clean and beautiful environment, A clean and an adequate supply of water, decent and adequate clothing, A balanced diet, A simple house to live in, Basic health care, Simple communication facilities, Minimum energy requirements, affordable education, and Cultural and spiritual needs.

Having understood the basic need for development, do the common man has any say in formation of grand plans made by bureaucrats and policy makers, sermons from moralizers, and goods and services from a market economy. In fact common man has no control at all over the ideas, technologies, strategies, and structures that are imposed upon them from outside. To make things worse they are also

made morally and legally accountable to themselves for whatever is imposed upon them through a representative democracy which in itself has become a mechanical process mostly devoid of human values.

What the common man wants is personal relationship, intimate shared experiences, direct cultural and spiritual life, household and small economic arrangements, participatory democracy and community politics. They are guided more by intuitive understanding than by organized and systematized knowledge. Development as practiced in post-independent India appears to be an elitist exercise which pushed common people to an increasing state of dependency and non-participation in decision-making processes which affect their lives.

Take the case of Village Khizrabad in Yamunanagar District, situated at the bank of River Yamuna. The development issues are save the land flood and soil erosion, provision of adequate number of boats to evacuate people in case of flood, health center adequately stocked for medicine for cholera and Malaria. All weather road to reach the village. A school for education of their wards and some sort of community employment programme for women, to supplement their income and allied agricultural activities for the man folk. The same development yardstick may not be applied to development of village Kunja in Poanta Sahib, Himachal Pradesh, situated 50 Km. away from Yamunanagar. In this village most of land is sloped requiring terrace farming. The land requires bands to protect it from soil erosion. Since all the villagers are small and marginal farmers and living on subsistence farming, here the development means providing employment to men folk and vocational and Industrial training to womenfolk to improve their living.

Has the development reached these two villages mentioned above? The answer is big No. In the name of development, we will find village road, full of potholes; never to be built again. Dilapidated building in the name of health centre, devoid of any health worker. School building without any boundary wall and toilets for girl child, subscribing "Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan". The reality is half of school going children are dropout of school or never attended school. The task of education is taken over by Maulvi in nearby Mosque giving religious education.

If, we look at the development planning for common man, it is completely taken over by institutional planning, in which, the people for whom development planning is made have no say. Such development efforts make people, more and more dependent on impersonal and distant institutions. They feel more and more alienated from centers of decision making and meaningful action. Their creative nature is never manifested in worthwhile activities. People feel compelled to seek redress through petitions to administrators, tamashas to please political leaders, letters of introduction from influential persons and

such other wasteful actions. At last, fed up with system, they overthrow governments by using the only power they have, the free vote, which is usually called “Anti Incumbency” factor. Usually the vicious circle starts again. Institutionalized economy is pressurized still more by increasing unemployment and inflation.

Having talked of institutional planning, it is interesting to know how our leaders are chosen to fight election? Do our political leaders, whom we elected at various levels right from Sarpanchs, Municipal Councilors’, MLA’s and MP’s know our development need?. In reality what do they, do after winning the election?. In India, candidates are chosen, if he or she has winning probability. If not, whether he is spoiler, to spoil the chances of rival candidates. In Indian context the winning probability is his caste, religion, region, linguistic, money and muscle power. The candidate may be fielded in election, for spoiling the winning prospect of rival candidate. Fighting election is not a pauper’s job. One need fairly large amount of money for electioneering. Having spent large part of money to gain power, the candidate cannot be expected to be saint, thinking of common man all the time. As the saying goes on that ‘Charity begins at home’, the politician after winning the election, is expected to first recover the cost of his/her electioneering and next do something that ensures recurring Income for him/her and his immediate family. The slogan “VIKAS” or development suddenly vanishes in wilderness.

It is also interesting to know, how the politician function in their constituency, which they vowed to make heaven. Let us start from Grassroots level. I am giving the example of Punjab, where old age pension is distributed through Sarpanch and Panchayat Secretary in cash. The money comes in the a/c of Panchayat in cash through welfare department of the state, which is usually in 2-3 Lacs depending upon the list of pensioners in the given Panchayat. The state government on the directive of Central Government decided to pay old Age Pension directly in the a/c of beneficiary; there it was found that approximately 50% of the beneficiaries are non- existent or ineligible to take pension. The state government knows it, but this system of cash payment has been devised to ensure perennial source of Income for elected representatives. Now take the case of any grant or say grant for construction of toilets in all the schools. As soon as the grant is deposited in the a/c of District Commissioner, the elected representatives make a beeline in the office to transfer the grant to their respective constituency. Since the work under grant is to be made in time bound manner, therefore to avail the grant, bills are prepared for completion of toilets and grant is siphoned off amongst bureaucrats and politician, with little or no work on the ground. Without naming the MLA, who has very good reputation of being honest and upright man, I am giving account of his work ethos In the morning, the party workers start making beeline with petition, seeking transfer of some official, planning for next rally to show his strength, employment for his/her wards and development work in his street or locality. The MLA attends only those person, whom he knows personally or belong to his party. This way only handful

having acquaintance with the MLA can get their work done. The common man who has elected him to that position of power is lost in crowd finding someone to approach MLA, whom he can not even face. His entire day passes in such activity or in party politics, leaving little time for even thinking development or need of his constituents. He starts considering his daily chores for his peer, as development work or nurturing of his constituency. I have chance to ask, what the priority development issue for his constituency is and his instant reaction was: he will first post his key men in key posts.

The same is case with members of Parliament, who are seldom seen in their constituency. To approach them, one has to cross many curtain walls and the last curtain wall end at his Personal Assistant. One can well understand where the common man stands after the election especially before those politicians, who used him as a tool to gain political power. His voice is lost in grand edifice of political spectrum. Now, the situation as, we understand is that political masters do not have time for development work, as they are intoxicated with power and remain busy reaping that fruit of political power. As the political masters are insulated from the development work, the task is taken over by bureaucracy and they control the complex, heartless super-structures that have been built to control and regulate people's lives. Sooner or later this realization comes to political master's mind that bureaucracy has become too complex and to control the bureaucracy, political masters feel themselves as powerless. Over a period of time, a self-perpetrating vicious system is formed in which common man is caught.

Now the question arises, what the common man do?. In the beginning of, this paper I have said that in democracy the ultimate power rest with common man. If the common man organize themselves and raise his/her voice, no power can withstand them. They can place powerful people to insignificant positions. Therefore either the movement must come from common man. Someone from common man must raise his/her voice. Even a single person can raise a voice and later on more people join and such voice becomes movement Or the privileged, the so-called intellectuals or the elite, bureaucrats or Political Masters should take the initiative to reach the common man, not to control him but to liberate him, not to manipulate him but to make him participate as an equal, in defining goals, setting targets and implementing plans and to turn development for common man from Rhetoric to Reality.

References:

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