

***Sixty Years after Tryst with Destiny: Woh Subaha Kabhi to Aygi**

by

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**Based on the Article, After `Tryst with Destiny`, Unending wait for the new dawn. The Tribune, 29 August 2007.*

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Nehru's 'tryst with destiny' suggested that India would wake up to a new day. The country has made substantial material progress since that fateful and historic day 60 years back. WE are consuming more of everything and poverty is supposed to have halved. But the freedom struggle had other goals as well. Countless people 'sacrificed their today for a better tomorrow for us'. Have we achieved that better today? Was there not a different vision than the one that we have worked for? Doubts arise not only because mass poverty and illiteracy (though less) persist and insanitary conditions and ill health continue on a mass scale to take a heavy toll but because we hardly have a vision left except to follow the West. In the process we have perhaps got the worst of both the worlds.

In material terms, a few, numbering less than 3% of the population, have done well while the rest are trapped in a low level equilibrium. We boast of more billionaires than Japan while in terms of per capita income we are in the bottom twenty out of 177 nations. Since their per capita income is 60 times ours, crudely speaking, we must be at least 60 times more unequal. Is it something to gloat about. Largest number of people below the poverty line, farmers suicides, huge urban slums, fields in and around cities functioning as vast toilets, the inability of the so called literates to understand modern technology, etc., suggest that the nation as a whole has yet to awake to a new morning. The 3% affluent adding up to 33 million people, a good size European nation, are nested in a vast ocean of deprivation.

In the 1958 movie, 'Phir Subaha Hogi', Mukesh singing with pathos, "Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi" (That morning will come some time), epitomized the dream of the common Indian of the Fifties and the Sixties. Many of us as children internalized the idea that we will build a better future for all our countrymen and perhaps we would build a new civilization that would surpass the West. Sixty years after independence perhaps the shreds of this dream are not even left in the dustbins of those in power and supposedly guiding the destiny of this nation. That dream has been blown away in the hurricane of achieving 9% growth.

The song is not just about eliminating poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy but above all about a dream of building a different society – a peaceful one where everyone (specially the marginalized) would live with dignity. Gandhi emphasising “last Person First” suggested that if everyone could hold their head high, no one could subjugate the nation. For him that is what the national struggle was all about – dignity for all. Mukesh captures the present situation in the line, “Miti ka bhi kuch mol magar insano ki kimat kuch bhi nahin” (Even earth has some value but human beings have none).

The song defines that happy morning as “Jab ambar jhum ke nachega, Jab dharti nagme gayegi”. When the sky would dance with joy and the Earth would sing songs. Today, at our low per capita consumption, the air, water and land are terribly polluted and weeping rather than singing and dancing. The most revered Ganga or Godavari are heavily polluted, their beds contaminated with huge amounts of toxic material that would affect the future generations. Even the sacred is no more sacred, so what is sacrosanct? Certainly not the dream of the National Movement.

The song goes “Jab dukh ke badal pighlenge” (when the clouds of sorrow will melt). For the vast numbers of the marginalized sections, sorrow is a daily and endless fare that is not melting away. Dozens of their children can disappear in Nithari and little is done. The only escape is what Bollywood dishes out - sex and violence. The government provides little relief since it fails to deliver. Faith in politicians is a casualty. Further, “Insano ki izzat jab jhute sikkon me na toli jayegi” (when people’s dignity would not be measured by false money). The dignity of the poor is even more firmly mortgaged to money when unemployment is so high and the youth has to take to crime to fulfill its expectations. “Mana ki abhi tere mere armano ki kimat kuch bhi nahin”, (Agreed that today our dreams have no value). But there was belief, one day this would change. The dreams of the deprived have no value to the rulers who in their self centeredness can only see in them the means to fulfill their own narrow dreams of great riches, like, in the misallocation of land meant for the poor displaced slum dwellers of dwellers.

Today labour is devalued while speculation and greed have been raised to a new high pedestal. A mere 1% of the population linked to the corporate sector earns more

than what 60%, dependent on agriculture, do. Disparities have risen more sharply in the last 6 years than in the earlier 54 years. The young are encouraged to sell soap but not to contribute to nation building through teaching and research. Sacrifice appears to be stupidity, undermining the entire effort of the freedom fighters. Those of them who still survive ruefully ask, is this what they fought for? Armed forces are losing officers and are understaffed since the private sector is so much more lucrative and why sacrifice since that is no more a virtue. Grab an opportunity if it presents itself – its right and wrong is immaterial – since the only surviving principle is 'what suits me is correct'.

The 3%, the ruling elite of the nation aspire to join the international elite, sending its children to study college abroad, going there for vacations or to hospitals for health problems. It is voting with its feet. A school in Chappra or a dispensary in Ghungrawali has little value to it but Delhi must have 24 hours water and electricity. That is progress. Most of the elite, businessmen, corrupt politicians and the corrupt executive have spirited vast sums of money abroad. This is not just for a rainy day but for a possible new life in case of difficulties at home. The emotional attachment with the nation is gone. For the elite, making society better is too much of a struggle.

Going abroad to work is considered highly desirable by society and the young encouraged to do so. More H1B visas are asked for by the government so that the best can go abroad rather than serving the nation. The short sightedness of the vision underlying such a move by the government escapes the ruling elite. Already, the country lacks dynamism and this situation is aggravated by the best leaving the shores. This is reflected in the country having to import most modern technologies since it lacks the ability to develop them indigenously. Even in the defence field where national effort has been concentrated, we depend largely on imports. LCA has been under development for more than 20 years and MBT for 25 years. Commercial nuclear reactors are being imported, etc.

Due to a lack of proper vision, laboratories, Universities and colleges function like offices, 9 to 5. They are largely treated as fiefdoms by the powerful to grant favours to their sycophants. Talent be damned and dynamism is a casualty. We are happy to get low value added jobs in Call Centres and BPOs so that the youth can work as

cyber coolies rather than working in highly skilled jobs. We are happy at producing 10,000 world class professionals out of the 10 million who join the work force every year. Most of the best then leave the shores to go abroad. What induced many earlier to return to the country was a vision of a different India. Now since that vision is transformed into making India a poor cousin of the West, why return to face some of the most uncivilized conditions in the world? Anyhow, why sacrifice – that is not today's value.

Corruption is rampant both in the public and the private sectors. Institutions, like the legislatures, judiciary and the bureaucracy, are breaking down. The elite is lawless breaking every single law – from traffic laws to building bye-laws to industrial and environmental laws. Many of the rich have earned more through illegal means than legal ones. The black economy continues to grow and is roughly 50% of GDP in spite of reduced tax rates and elimination of many controls.

The political leaders hardly represent the people - leading a life of luxury. Democracy is a great institution but in India it has been turned into a fine art for self aggrandizement. The bankruptcy of our leadership led to our jettisoning of the ideas of independent development in the Eighties and of the 'last person first' in the Nineties.

From tall leaders like Gandhi who could give up everything to the present day leadership that cannot give up anything. From the idea of voluntary poverty to the notion of greed as the driving force of our society. From society and nation to the self. A JRD Tata or a Bacchan rated higher than Nehru (or many others) indicates the demise of a national vision and the fall from grace of visionaries. The transition has been made from an inclusive national vision for all to an exclusivist vision for a few. The situation echos the line in Mukesh's song, "Miti ka bhi kuch mol magar insano ki kimat kuch bhi nahin" (Even earth has some value but human beings have none). Farmers commit suicide in increasing numbers and the response is ineffective packages. In the new vision, making huge airports takes precedence over giving access to clean drinking water and toilets to all.

The land of Gandhi has turned into the land of the bania (not that he was not a bania). There is a great deal of hype about the Sixtieth year of Independence which was not there for the Fortieth or the Thirtieth and this is a reflection of the times when media hype and commercial interests dominate. Anything, including one's shauhrat (fame) can be encashed – nothing wrong in it. Nothing matters any more – a Tendulkar finds greater satisfaction in advertising and running restaurants than attempting to better Don Bradman's record.

The credit for this U-turn goes to the very party which Gandhi built. Clever ones would shamelessly argue, even Gandhi would have done the same in the present context. Would they consider that a man given to simplicity, sacrifice and truth and not show, half truths and consumerism would have blanched at this suggestion?

From the notion that the ills of our society have a social cause to the idea that the individual is to blame for her predicament, it is a long journey. Everyone now has to go to the market to get what they need, government is no more responsible for elimination of poverty, etc.. The devil may take the hindmost.

The nation can boast of many things in post independence India. A democracy – even if it barely functions under the weight of criminals and corrupt leaders sitting in the legislatures. Better position for some women even if they are now more of a commodity in the market than ever before. Better position for some Dalits even if their leaders are corrupt and repeatedly coopted by the elite. There is more sugar, more clothing and more milk per capita today than ever before but there is more adulteration of food and more lifestyle and pollution related disease than ever before. There are more educational institutions today but their quality is pitiful and they suffer from rampant corruption. Where are the teachers who could be the ideals for the children to emulate? They would much rather go to coaching classes than spend time with children.

Some people with idealism survive who continue to fight in spite of adversity – carrying the dream forward. Nations are built on dreams but we have narrowed it to money making. So how do we build a great nation as `Nehru's tryst' suggested or to which Mukesh referred to in the song, "Jis subaha ki khatir yug yug se ham sab mar

mar ke jite aiyen hain". (That morning for whose sake from eons we all have been living by dying a thousand deaths). Gandhi had a dream for the nation that the party he helped build has shattered.

He perhaps saw what was coming so he wanted the party to dissolve itself so that this farce would not have occurred. He wanted the Rashtrapati Bhavan to be converted into a hospital not because that would have been very functional but because that would have given birth to many more dreams and prevented many of the freedom fighters from turning into rulers in the imperial mould. The lament is not that we have not achieved anything but that we could have done much better if we had stayed with the dream of the national movement which has now evaporated from the national consciousness. So Sixty years down the road we are still waiting for that new dawn in the midst of 9% growth. Today Mukesh would have to sing, 'Who Subaha Abhi to Nahin Ayegi'.

The song by Mukesh from the 1958 movie, 'Phir Subaha Hogi':

Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi

Hindi Song

English Translation

Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi
In kali sadiyon ke sar se
Jab rat ka anchal dhalke ga
Jab dukh ke badal pighlenge
Jab subaha ka sagar chalkega
Jab ambar jhum ke nachega
Jab dharti nagme gayegi
Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi

That morning will come some time
When from the head of these black centuries
The scarf of night would slip away
When the clouds of sorrow will melt
When the ocean of morning would brim over
When the sky would dance with joy
When the Earth would sing songs
That morning will come some time

Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi
Jis subaha ki khatir yug yug se
ham sab mar mar ke jite aiyen hain
Jis subaha ki amrit bundon ki khatir
hum zahar ke pyale pite hain
In bhuki pyasi ruhon par ek din to
karam farmeyga
Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi

That morning will come some time
That morning for whose sake from eons
we all have been living by dying a thousand deaths
For the sake of the drops of elixir of that morning
we drink the cup of poison
One day fate will bless these thirsty and hungry souls
That morning will come some time

Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi
Mana ki abhi tere mere armano ki
kimat kuch bhi nahin
Miti ka bhi kuch mol magar insano
ki kimat kuch bhi nahin
Insano ki izzat jab jhute sikkon me
na toli jayegi
Woh Subaha Kabhi to Ayegi

That morning will come some time
Agreed that at present the value of our dreams is
nothing
Even earth has some value but human beings have
none
When people's dignity will not be weighed with false
coins
That morning will come some time