

Editorial

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The debate between development and democracy always comes in our minds when we start analysing the fate of developing countries of the world. People often talk about faster economic development of China as well as India. But china's case is different from that of India since it is characterised as a socialist developmental state or market socialist state. It is an authoritarian country where discipline and people's participation are not a big deal or problem. Whereas India is all together in a different league of developmental states. Any discourse on the issue must take into consideration the fact that democracy and development should go hand in hand. And therefore, India can be called a democratic developmental state. It is so called because India has maintained a decent percentage of sustained economic growth in per capita GDP and has also done well to maintain its democratic character, except for two years interlude of the National Emergency from 1975 to 1977.

What India requires is great visionary leaders to chalk out developmental goals with greater farsightedness on the one hand and a well-disciplined, well informed responsible citizens on the other. Disciplined citizens who have requisite civic sense are often viewed as the backbone of any country. Ironically when we visit India from this perspective, we identify problems on both the fronts. We have some visionary leaders who can steer through the developmental path, but their number is miniscule. On the other hand, we are way behind the other countries of the world which have developed themselves much faster. For instance, in the case of South Korea, when General Park Chun Hee took the charge, he inspired the citizens by instilling in them such patriotic feelings that if they work hard, the nation will develop and prosper, and if the

nation prospers the citizens will also prosper. In the Indian context, the need of the hour is to compare our government and civil society with the governments and civil societies of other nations in terms vis-a-vis the generally accepted criteria for democracy. Citizens should be challenged to make judgments about whether or not their government and civil society are more or less democratic and free than those of other countries. They can also introspect to gain a sense of how they can strengthen participatory democracy with developing good citizenship skills.

Many of us have children who are growing up, and as responsible parents we ensure that they receive the best of education and learn and develop necessary attitudes, values and the 21st century skills—the building blocks to 21st century learning and citizenship. The curricular developers and educationists today give clear cut guidelines to include the skills of critical thinking and problem solving, effective communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation in the core subjects. Such skills are required because as our children grow, their personal, professional and public lives grow more complicated every year in a more globally connected world.

But how many of us recognise the need to develop the democratic participation and good citizenship skills to strengthen our civil society and democratic fabric?

Just as we need to prepare our children to face the future challenges of a complex civil society, we must also recognise that a healthy democracy must foster age-appropriate instructions in civic knowledge and skills through civic engagement and the process of political mobilisation, by providing people the opportunities to participate in local groups, organisations and institutions.

Today's citizens are faced with higher expectations in both as citizens of their own country and as global citizens. And therefore, as a part of this new 21st Century Global Citizen force, the people need to prepare themselves for what they will need to know and be able to do in their local community, at work and throughout all aspects of personal and civic life. People can build these skills by applying them as they participate in society. And we know that a successful democracy thrives on active citizens who have the necessary democratic participation skills that will increase their grasp of what they're gaining, as well their overall engagement in their own welfare.

Citizen participation is at the core of democratic citizenship and democratic decision-making that brings about positive effects on the quality of democracy.

The largest democracy of the world will survive and develop resilience only when its citizens understand the importance of taking responsibility in their local and wider communities. They must participate with responsibility and develop such skills that can help them to make informed decisions.

Learning to Give

For citizens to be capable of fully engaging in civic and political life, they must possess a minimum of civic skills.

What are civic skills?

Civic skills include personal communication skills, knowledge of political systems, and the ability to critically think about civic and political life (Comber 2003). Civic skills thus include the abilities to communicate with elected officials, organise rallies and mobilise people to influence policy, understand and participate in local polity, and think critically about civic and political life.

Importance

In modern times, it is not desirable to limit citizen participation to political decision-making, but it should also encompass local needs and communities. It is important that citizens, both young and old, see themselves as members of a civic society, so as to develop a sense of common good, and recognize their important role in achieving it. However, in order to be effective citizens, one must acquire the ability and willingness to make judgments about what is best for the whole. These judgments must always be rooted in such principles as fairness, liberty and a commitment to the greater good rather than one's own interests.

It is important to find acceptance as a member of any civic group as a worthy contributor.

There are people or groups in society dealing with high stress levels due to a variety of environmental or combination causes. Such groups are easily frustrated, resist any efforts to include, and as a result often feel rejected. Citizen groups can work to create relationships with such groups outside of conflict situations, sustain relationships during conflicts, build trust levels in them, and help them find acceptance as a member of the group and worthy individual.

Citizen forums must engage people to help them express strong emotions in non-threatening ways. They can initiate interactions with such groups. Conflicts can be avoided and resolved with others by expressing views in non-

aggressive ways. Values of sharing and cooperation; helps reduce conflicts in these situations.

Solving problems creatively, independently and in cooperation with others can be achieved in two ways—as individuals and together with others. Individuals can engage with the issue in their personal capacity in their own way. Together with others, they can work in cooperation engaging with the issue and focusing, persevering, and together solving the problem.

The democratic participation skills include accepting the unique human qualities in others. Citizens can work on this skill by going out of their comfort zones to initiate friendly interactions with others. Such forums need to ensure that all members of the group are accepted and appreciated.

Citizens need to think intelligently and ethically in social situations by accommodating others needs and perspectives at least as much as their own. Important here is to emphasise that the members should not feel pressured to show such a behaviour but can contribute with their free will.

Educating the public about civic skills helps them learn to become active citizens and emphasizes the importance of acquiring the knowledge and attitudes that will lead them to become competent and responsible contributors to the public sphere. These citizens can act responsibly and demonstrate politically correct civic virtues, social responsibility and exhibit tolerance and respect and move with a purpose to make a difference in the social and political spheres.

Civic skills provide the foundation for responsible and community-minded citizens. Those who possess and maximize the skills feel a link to their communities and contribute to the well-being of the fellow citizens.

A great skill to successfully participate in a constructive manner is to have powerful conversations and group discussions that allows citizens to work together with other members of society to achieve common goals. These skills facilitate constructive resolution of issues and then guide conversation in a productive direction.

Practice of voting and petitioning can be used to ensure that each citizen's voice is heard in the public sphere, and that a group of citizens can join hands to influence positive and desirable changes. In present-day India, voting is a right of every adult citizen, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or socioeconomic status. In order to exercise this right effectively in taking informed decision about electing the right representative is at the core of exercising a citizen's

formal expression of preference for a political candidate. It can be just as critical to individual participation in government.

As stated in the beginning that India needs to develop it faster to catch up with the West as well as to compete with China and other faster developing economies of the world. To achieve this target India must balance between a well contributing citizens and visionary leadership. The government then will fix the target and the citizens will execute by active contribution exactly in the same way as in cases of successful developers of south-east Asian countries. For the same India must develop citizens skills as mentioned in the earlier paragraphs. Right now, the problem with Indian developmental state is that people are very much aware about their rights but when it comes to take the responsibilities of a good citizen, they shy away from it. Leadership is also not bothered about the success of government's initiatives and programmes or targets, but they are more concerned about winning elections. A balance of both is needed for faster economic growth and sustained democracy.