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21st Century India & the Non Resident Indians

Every 15th August and 26th January, we Indians, especially we NRIs make a lot of hue and cry about the problems within India. But the million dollar question is what exactly we NRIs doing for India? Before however, I take this issue further, let us look back a little on the Indian history, geography and social structure. India is a country of villages. Almost two thirds of India's more than 1 billion people live in rural areas, and almost 170 million of them are poor. Although many rural people are migrating to cities, three out of four of India's poor people live in the vast rural parts of the country. For more than 21 per cent of them, poverty is a chronic condition. Poverty is deepest among scheduled castes and tribes.

After independence, India adopted the British model of democracy with main objectives of providing social, economic and political justice, besides equality and dignity of an individual. We all know that poverty is a curse. And we all, living in the UK and other rich countries must admit that over 99 per cent of us are in this country because of the poor economic conditions back home. A major cause of poverty among rural people in India is lack of access for both individuals and communities to productive assets and financial resources. High levels of illiteracy, inadequate health care and extremely limited access to social services are common among poor rural people.

Besides poverty, terrorism, population-bomb and illiteracy, India's progress is blocked by corruption. The most disquieting aspect of the widespread corruption in India is the fact that it is not anymore confined to politicians or the government machinery alone. It is prevalent amongst almost every section of the society at every level. Today, if one would say that any particular Indian is honest to the core, whether he or she lives in India or any other country like UK or Canada, it could only be a case of exception rather than a rule.

India has an image of a corrupt country. And no doubt, corruption is prevalent everywhere. The study of world phenomenon on corruption has repeatedly branded India as one of the most corrupt nations in the world. How shameful it is that view does not disturb most of the Indians at all. They are not willing to accept the fact and seem happy with the existing systems which allows them to make money and get things done in one way or the other.

Corruption is a very serious issue, and the disturbing fact is that it has been adopted just as a routine in our lives in India. Almost all public dealing departments are corrupt. Police, Sales Tax, Income tax, Land and Registry, Lower Courts, and others are corrupt to the core. Petty corruption is especially endemic at the lower, clerical levels of administration, the entry level point at which the ordinary citizen comes into daily contact with officialdom. People are forced to pay bribes for securing virtually

any service connected with the government. It would be difficult to exaggerate the revulsion felt by ordinary Indians toward the ubiquitous and institutionalized venality of public life.

In Japan and South Korea, former prime ministers and children of presidents have been jailed for corruption. In India, it has taken six decades that the judiciary has started becoming independent and now there are instances coming every day about the punishment meted out to the politicians and the powerful. Still many politicians, from Lalu to Jaya Lalitha, Mayawati to Mulayam Singh Yadav, Parkash Singh Badal to Raja Sahib Amrinder Singh, and many other elite, rich and the powerful who have been implicated in scandals - and they are numerous - are far away from conviction. These are not only my views but Mr. Ramesh Thakur, the eminent personality of the UN University in Tokyo has almost echoed the same sentiments as I have, in his book 'Government and Politics of India.

At the same time, this fact can also not be ignored that most of the Indians living in the UK and other developed nations just don't know that even the developed world is also very corrupt. Not going far, if we take UK only, its system is full of corruption. Everybody now knows of the widespread corruption in the political, construction, defence and health sectors. Most of the Councils have corrupt officials. The picture is still vivid in my mind about the 19 corrupt Councillors from Doncaster, or the frauds by arms Company BAE the charges against which were dropped on the insistence of Tony Blair or the much publicised case of Cash for honours or the 28 Million Pound U.K. Tanzania deal scandal or the Labour Party's sleaze of 2 Million pounds every year from Tax Payer's Council Money. And I still remember former Conservative leader Duncan Smith who was paying thousands of pounds to his wife from the tax payer's money for the job she was not doing.

Let us know more about the corruption in the U.K. The 41% of the respondents in a 2006 survey of corruption within the UK construction industry said they had been offered a bribe on at least one occasion. See CIOB Survey, on its website. Similarly According to TI's 2006 Global Corruption Barometer Report, UK respondents perceived political parties to be the sector (out of a total of 14) to be most affected by corruption. See TI Global Corruption Barometer, on www.transparency.org. Further, according to a Control Risks/Simmons & Simmons 2006 survey of international business attitudes to corruption, a quarter of UK-based international companies said they had lost business to corrupt competitors in the last 5 years. See Survey, on crg.com. Those who are interested more to know about UKs corruption, especially in police, they should read "Bent Coppers". The author is James Morton and it has been printed 4 times. The corruption list of UK is endless. And the so is of all the countries of the world. Yes, some exceptions are there like, Finland, Denmark, Norway etc. where corruption is extremely low. However, I am not here to judge what is going on in the world over. I am concerned about my motherland India, which is facing all these problems for centuries. Why?

Even after 60 years of independence from two centuries of British rule, the large scale poverty, corruption and inefficiency remains the most shameful blot on the face of India. The lack of work culture, distaste for manual work, illiteracy and certain religious beliefs among the Indian populace, are other plagues of India. This has now become a vicious cycle. Simultaneously, population growth rate has been exceeding

the economic growth rate. Then there were the protectionist policies pursued since 1947 to 1991 which prevented large amounts of foreign investment in the country.

After corruption, it is casteism which has ruined the country, its social fibre, tolerance and heritage. The ancient Manuvad has gone into the blood of we Indians. Casteism is an Indelible Indian reality. It is so indelible that it is among communities who now profess religions that decry caste distinctions. Why is it that the caste is such a sticky factor that it refuses to die despite its ban constitutionally? Why do we still have V.P. Singh's Mandalization of Indian Politics? Why many centuries after their conversion to Islam and Christianity do Muslims and Christians still subconsciously and consciously observe the caste system they inherited from their Hindu ancestors? Why the latest religion on this earth, the Sikhism with excellent teachings and tenets of its ten most revered Gurus and such a divine and holy Guru Granth Sahib, is also practising casteism? Why Casteism is still a living practice and continues to plague our 21st century India?

During the last sixty years or so the Central and the State Governments have initiated measures to achieve these objectives through legislation and economic, social and cultural activities via Five-Year Plan routes. There has been some progress in achieving some of these objectives also but in attaining social and economic equality and equality of status as well as of opportunity there have been a number of obstacles. That does not mean that India is a failed state. Not at all. The growth of the middle class which even did not exist at the time of independence, is now the most strong and proud citizens which has grown over 300 million. In the last 60 years, 300 million people, the total population of the USA, has been able to reach excellent living standards.

Poverty alleviation is expected to make better progress in the next 50 years now as the trend has already by set when Dr. Manmohan Singh became the Finance Minister in the year 1991. The result are encouraging because of the growing middle class. Increasing stress on education, globalisation, increasing empowerment of women and the economically weaker sections of society, are also expected to contribute to the alleviation of poverty. Micro-enterprise development, which could generate income and enable them to improve their living conditions, has finally become a focus of the government programmes.

The most sad thing is that even religions have failed us. It is the right time now that we should reinterpret our religious books and reorganize religious institutions which can make massive impact on the average Indian mind. But the problem is the uneven distribution of wealth. Still what about those millions who live below the poverty line? In the words of R. Upadhaya, "If we see the history of the world, we will know of the corruption and nepotism as the main reasons behind the fall of Roman empire, the French Revolution, October Revolution in Russia, fall of Chiang Kai-Shek Government on the mainland of China and even the defeat of the mighty Congress party in India in 1977. But they are not ready to take any lesson from the pages of history." And it is a very sad story that under the nose of such an honest person like Dr. Manmohan Singh, millions of dollars were fraudulently pocketed by his corrupt ministers.

The worst thing is that we all are aware of these problems but we do nothing about them. Now the question arises here, what we, the citizens of India or the Non-Resident Indians are doing for the country? I meet every day so many Indians in the U.K., Canada and U.S.A., and I am astonished to see that everybody is a Chairman of some Political Party or an Association or such groups. I have seen more Indian Chairmen in this country than we have Punjabi singers in Punjab. But what these organizations are doing for the country? Getting grants from the British governments? Or pocketing money? Or organizing Kabaddi matches in Punjab? Or just fighting in the names of Castes? Or busy in constructing a new religious building every day? What is going on? All such NRIs while sitting and drinking scotch in their drawing rooms or Pubs, contribute nothing except criticism. We NRIs are good for nothing. Not even one percent of NRIs, especially the north Indians i.e. the Punjabis, are doing constructive things for India. They might be donating money for some religious buildings in their villages, but what about the Education, Schools, Hospitals, Dispensaries, Libraries, Counselling Houses? Nothing constructive or concrete is being done or achieved. If this is the fact, then they should have no right to discuss Indian System of functioning and the Indian way of life. We NRIs should have a clear vision, a clear aim and a clear cut approach how to take action to contribute our bit towards our motherland.

It is a shame that I have not seen a single Punjabi NRI who would be reading a good newspaper in the UK. No one likes to spend mere forty pence to buy a newspaper? Why? Because we think that we are full of knowledge. Because we think what little information we get from certain cheap TV channels and free newspapers, is the ultimate truth. Because we don't have the psyche to differentiate between what is truth and what is not. And it is so, because we have neither developed culturally nor in terms of humanity. We know nothing except criticism, criticism and criticism. The psychology of a positive thought and contribution can be developed only when we are able to think rationally and contemporarily. Look at the state of Gujrat and our own condition of Punjab. This may help understand the difference between the backward thoughts and the positive advancement. During 2010-11, not a single penny went to Punjab state from the NRIs while over 4 billion dollars were invested by the Gujrati community in Gujrat, and remember, they are mostly Hindus. Only Kabaddi-Kabaddi, Daru and Dhol and criticism of Hindus and other communities will not bring any changes. Never forget, if the practices of other religions are wrong, then why our new religion has failed totally in terms of any positive change?

The knowledge and understanding of my own Punjabi community is so poor that they think 'Punjab is India.' Whenever they want to say anything about 'Punjab,' they will use the term 'India'. 'India is this, India is that'. In fact they want to say 'Punjab is this and Punjab is that'. Those people, who have not seen a single city in India, and have relocated straight to the UK or elsewhere from their tiny villages, know nothing about India. They don't know how many states exist in India and how many are on the top list. They don't know about the great cities India have. They have no idea the kind of motorways are developed in Hyderabad and Bangalore. They have no idea of hundreds of thousands of British, Canadian, US, Australian and people from other developed nations go to India every year for a number of surgical procedures to get the best treatments. Here let me make clear, no country is developed fully. Some states of India are very developed now like some states in the US. How many readers know that out of 50 US states, not even half are fully developed? How many of us

know that UK is the crime capital of Europe. Every 10 minutes a crime is committed in the UK. About 6 million crimes are committed every year. In 2007, 927 murders were committed in the UK according to a report of 2nd July 2009 in UK's reputed daily Telegraph while in America during the same period, 16,692 murders were committed. The number of rape cases was maximum in the US which recorded 93,934 such assaults followed by South Africa 54,926 and India 18,359. India is a huge country with twenty two times more population than the UK, and hence naturally, has more crime rate.

I don't want to count on the bad things of other countries. Two wrongs never make one right. We should think about ourselves and our country. Yes, statistical comparisons sometimes become important to understand various matters. Let us start from the self-introspection. However it is never too late. Let us try to be honest with ourselves. Let us try to understand that mere talking nonsense all the twenty four hours will not bring any change, 'karma' is of utmost importance. We have already celebrated our 65th Independence day. There is an excellent English proverb "Charity Begins at Home". Let us start from our home in the U.K. Let us stop Casteism here among ourselves first! Let us stop constructing religious places in this country on the basis of castes and religions! Let us stop wasting money on these lavish marriage parties! Let us first stop the dowry system here in the U.K and then worry about India! Let our businessmen friends should stop bungling with the VAT and other tax system here! Let us take oath that we will not take welfare and social help fraudulently! Let us start thinking of putting our children on the right path! Let us stop boasting of our culture and religions and condemning others! Once we are able to set our home right, we should start doing something for the country which is known as India! The country which is now world's 4th largest economy! Which is now having one of the best growth rates in the world. Imagine, how fast we could grow if Casteism, corruption and illiteracy could be wiped out from our minds, from the minds of every Indian.

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