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Decentralisation and Development
By

Prof. L.C. Jain

A lecture was delivered on "Decentralization & Development" by Prof. L. C. Jain, former member planning Commission. The lecture was presided by Shri G. Krishanan, State Election Commissioner, and Jharkhand. The Programme was organised at ATI on the evening of 6th March by PRIA and Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Swashashan Samwanway Samittee (JPRSSS). Mr. Chandan Datta, state coordinator was the moderator for this session.

Mr. Datta welcomed all the participants and gave an overview of the meeting of some NGO's with Prof. L.C. Jain on the previous day. He said that all the participants were very keen to listen from the eminent Gandhian and noted economist on the theme of the lecture.

Mr. Datta first requested Sri G. Krishnan to take the dais and speak on the topic. Hon'ble Election Commissioner Shri G. Krishanan when invited to address the audience said that the plight of Panchayat elections in Jharkhand could be related to the Hindi film song "Alaa Jaane Kya Hoga Aage, Maula Jaane Kya Hoga Aage." However, conducting Panchayat Election was his hearty wish but he said that his hands were tied because of cumbersome government procedures. He said that he was very sorry for not holding elections and that he was saddened. However, he talked about the situation in the state that resulted in this crisis.

He wrapped up without saying anything much, except that he was there to listen to the eminent Gandhian, Prof. L.C. Jain.

Prof. Jain in his lecture told that, as everyone was aware that the state election commission is a constitutional authority and it is endowed with certain responsibilities. Referring to Jharkhand, he said that the state is in a constitutional dilemma as there have been no elections to municipal or to the Panchayats so far since the last 28 yrs. He expressed his good luck of being with the election commission during the last three conferences. He told that he was assured of the fact that the constitution was safe in their hands. He said as per the Panchayat Elections there has been creation of two bodies (I) SEC (II) SFC. SEC has to ensure timely elections of the Panchayats first like the elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislature. However, he said that there are states where Panchayats exists but do not function properly due to financial constraints. SFC has been created to work out a formula/rules, which should govern the division of resource between the states and the local bodies.

The Election Commission, he said, is an independent body. The responsibility of the State Election Commission is to conduct elections at specified time. He said it has been seen that in states where SEC exists have faced innumerable difficulties. In an interesting revelation, he said the state Election Commission has also approached the Supreme Court. This happened during the elections to the Zila Parishad in Karnataka. He said that Supreme Court has made "disclosure guidelines" for enabling fair elections. This has been in effect since the 2004 elections. As per the guidelines, each representative has to mention his identify, criminal background if any, has to disclose his educational qualifications and financial status. After this order was passed all political parties sat together in a meeting to discuss this. Even those parties who were not in talking terms also came on a common platform and discussed the order in detail and unanimously came to the conclusion that the order

was not justified. The parties suggested that once a representative gets elected, he shall disclose all his details to the speaker.

Prof. Jain said that the court has appealed to the common man, to choose law makers and not law breakers as their representatives.

Election Commissioner ordered that the disclosure guidelines be notified and passed an ordinance that this revelation was mandatory. Earlier also, this matter was taken up by a civil society organization to the court in Ahmadabad. Eminent members of IIM were also a part of this society.

After the ordinance was passed, the same society again went to the court and against the right to information Act (RTIA) demanded that the representatives will have to disclose all the details about themselves. This system has been enforced in all the schemes. He said that this is a revolutionary change. This change has opened up space for people who thought politics was a dirty game.

Pointing out to the decision taken by Bihar Chief Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, of the State taking over the responsibility of implementing the scheme if the central government failed in this regard. He however said that this is all politics. He also talked about the dirty game of horse trading which is in full swing in present day politics in all the states. He said that a lactometer is used to measure the purity of milk, but how should we measure this dirt in politics? He said "earlier parties were involved in horse handling but now shamelessly MP's and MLA's are bought for a price"!

He further said that we have to ensure the voters right. We should not aim for a 60% turn-over but for 100%. He encouraged the CBO's to carry on with their good work of development. He encouraged the efforts of CSO's saying that in areas where there was no productivity; even if very little change takes place there it is appreciable. But we have to constantly move ahead and taken bigger responsibilities. Sighting an example, he said that if the father dies, the son feels the very next day that he has tremendous responsibilities on his shoulders. One has to do things suddenly which has never been thought before!

He expressed his pleasure and happiness one the report presented by LJK and said that he was very satisfied listening to the commitment of Shri Arbind Kumar for demanding for a change during his speech in the first half of the day. He said that if there had been a telephone in heaven, he would have called up Gandhi and J.P. and said them that they should relax and have tea as their work was going on. He encouraged the participants saying that India is not a small country where only one Gandhi could he born. He finds Gandhi at all places that he visits.

He narrated an incident when he was giving away the certificates to candidates of a training programme in Karnataka. He asked one of the women present there that " If You became the Prime Minister one day, what would you do"? One woman who looked very poor said that this could never he possible! But when Prof. Jain questioned her that why she couldn't be the PM when Gandhi considered the common people to be the PM. On listening to this statement, she put her two fingers on her heart and said that she has become the PM and she would make arrangements for the education of every child in the country. She emphasized that she would not only ensure education for her children, or the children of Karnataka but

for all the children of the country. Prof. Jain was carried away with her statement and told her that no PM in the last 50 Years has uttered this statement.

He urged the women present there, not to feel shy as they had lot of power within themselves. Listening to this all the women spoke up. They said that they would stop alcohol irrespective of the monetary gains to the government because it harms their household and the country too!

Prof. Jain shared with the audience that the agenda that those women made had never been made by any PM, CM or commissioner of the country. He said we have stalwarts like them in our country who are a source of inspiration for us. When we say that they are not educated, we still believe that they invest lot of power and are incomparable!

Talking about the present scenario he said 30 lakh representatives are to be elected of which 1/3 i.e. 10 lakhs will be women. When so many representatives will come forward, then there will be a change in the political structure of the country and he said that he was convinced that this would definitely happen. At Present times, money power is being used to buy tickets worth lakhs of rupees. Inexperienced and novice people also get party tickets for huge sums of money. He said, that the consequence of this can be related to the condition where an inexperienced person flies an airplane instead of the pilot. This situation will definitely lead to a crash referring to a political crash if the scenario would not change.

He further said that bringing about this change calls for a revolution. We should not consider this as an easy thing. He said that he is aware of diverting the audience's attention from development to system because if the system cleans up everything will automatically fall in place. The system can only change if people are aware of local responsibilities.

Talking about the positive changes brought about by the people in Karnataka, he narrated an incident when a pond was to be mortgaged. Assistant Director of fisheries was also present. The pond was mortgaged for Rs. 80,000 and Rs.20,000 was deposited at the Panchayat. When the mukhiya was questioned by the people on this matter, he got scared. People asked him to speak the truth and bring the remaining Rs. 60,000. The Pradhan got Rs. 60,000 from his house.

The Gram Sabha consequently disqualified him for 5 years. With this example he wanted to highlight that when people start using their power, the system will itself clean up.

He said that he has always asked people to remain vigilant with eyes ears open and take immediate action against any system/process working against the spirit of democracy.

Prof. Jain said that corruption can be contained & minimised by making improvement in the political arrangement. He said that presently 800 members are elected to the Lok Sabha and 4000 members to the State Assembly. But for the kind of election process which is existing is slowly creating to distrust among the people. However he expressed hope that the political situation could be improved through holding Panchayat Elections.

Prof. Jain said that revolution could not be achieved without generating awareness among the people and villagers. He however acknowledged that this level of

awareness was increasing rapidly day by day which is going to do good to the society at large.

He emphasized that NGO's should take active initiative in the "cleaning up" process during election. NGO's should regularly inspect the voters list and point out the ambiguities faults which shall lead to elimination of dummy voters, dead or displaced persons. This shall go a long way in ensuring a fair election. He also called upon the youth to play an effective role in the cleaning up of the election process.

At the same time he talked exhaustively on the NREGA. He said that the organisations and people have to come forward to demand for their rights. After registration of their names under NREGS, people don't have to do anything. They simply have to come for work at 8 in the morning and ask for work. If no work is allotted for a day or two, can be tolerated. But if work is not available for some more time, patience of the people will give way and government officials shall fall of their feet if they will not provide work as people will have power to turn the political system and bureaucracy upside down. Further talking about 20 of the 22 districts in Jharkhand, being covered under NREGA, he was pleasantly surprised. He then thoughtfully asked all the participants as to how could there be so much peace in this situation? He said that Jharkhand is the only state in the country where the proportion of the districts covered under NREGA is so high. This situation calls for "Kranti" (revolution) and all of us have to come together to rise to this occasion.

He further went on to say, that it is the first time since the independence of India, that there is a guarantee for all unemployed people to get employment i.e. to say that the people have now the right to ask for jobs & get a guarantee of work wherein they are eligible to get Rs. 60/- (min) per day Rs. 60, as this employment guarantee ultimately links to the stomach of a person which shamefully demands food not just once but three times a day. And when hunger knocks, it has the power to topple all systems

He reflected that J.P. had organised youth for generating Kranti. This situation too called for a Kranti.

He referred to NREGA being the first guarantee scheme since independence, which is a very significant move. People in our country don't get employment but the government assures employment guarantee and employment is not been given. He said it seemed to him that the meaning of guarantee is also fading from the Government work system.

He also advised to collect all the advertisement from newspaper and compile them to make it in to a weapon against the government. He further said that if government fails to give guarantee, the youth will definitely not fail to obtain it. If they don't get work for 3 days, they will choose their leader and demand for an answer. With constant demand, the government will have to fulfill the demand generated.

Arbind Kumar of LJK assured that awareness and Chetna will be dawned on to the people which will lead to positive changes in the present situation.

Mr. Chandan Datta brought the session to an end after reemphasizing the need for all of us to think seriously in the direction shown by Prof. L.C. Jain. He thanked Prof. Jain, Shri G. Krishnan, Mr. Arbind Kumar and all the participants and called of the session.

Summary

The whole lecture of Prof. Jain revolved around Gandhiji's dream of "SWARAJ"- Power to the people. Prof. Jain's sharp, firm and revolutionary statements had the power to make all participants realize the need of them coming together and fighting for their rights.

He reassured his firm belief in the youth of today & encourage them saying that they had the power to change the present for a brighter tomorrow. He said if required the youth should not hesitate in resorting to 'kranti' (revolution) if the situation so demands for.

Applauding the initiatives taken by CSO/NGOs in the development process, he said that it was the responsibility of CSOs to show the way to the rural people viz: RTIA, NREGA and other development schemes.

" Keep your eyes ears open" – he said.

He forcefully brought to the fore the incomparable strength & contribution of the womenfolk in the development process. He said "women are a source of inspiration to us. Why should women be given only a status of 1/3 when the constitution has given equal rights and status to both men & women?"

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