Tasteful metaphors, poor politics

By Chitresh Kumar
Mar 9 2018, 1:10 IST

The recent political speeches about "rewriting history" and "unemployed people should sell pakodas" raises concerns about the quality of the ongoing political debate as well as the policies they will influence. Though the quality of debate and policy formulation exercise may seem orthogonal to each other, they pathologically reflect the contemporary organisational philosophies of the government and the opposition, together influencing the country's long-term vision of growth and development.

Jawaharlal Nehru and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, both feted as statesmen, were known for their oratory and remembered for their vision of nation-building through dams, ITs, the Golden Quadrilateral, etc. Not long ago, during NDA's stint in the opposition, Sushma Swaraj's oratory made former speaker Meira Kumar apprehensive about the 'abadab Shayaris' (poetic gesture of sharing Urdu couplets) as she was "repaying a loan of one couplet with two couplets".

Political speeches and debates should communicate in-depth analysis of an issue in a lucid manner. They should provide views that might have been previously ignored or not pondered upon. When people responsible for debate at the highest-level start discussing 'chai' and 'pakoda,' indirectly being impertinent to the unemployed as well as to the informal activity of selling snacks, then our policies will reflect similar discord.

The 68th round of the National Sample Survey reports that more than half of India's workers have no formal contracts. This means that they have no employee benefits, such as paid leave. Additionally, their skill base and experience cannot be formalised for wage revision. They don't have any unionised representation. Their inability to formalise also means a bleak future outlook for upward mobility. The failure in safeguarding worker rights for some 30-35% of workers has been a chronic problem for all governments.

Additionally, according to the report "Slums in India-2015", nearly 22.5% of urban India lives in slums or informal housing. Taken together, these statistics depict a scenario when nearly 20% of urban India works without any labour rights and lives in slums that are sometimes illegally encroached and are in uninhabitable condition.

This, alongside the data on the squalid condition of rural and tribal housing, shows us a more frightening situation in terms of overall assessment of livelihood and living conditions of informal sector employees. Further, demolition and sealing drives for encroachment and commercial activities on footpaths, residential areas and government land results in the informal sector surviving at the margins at work as well as at home.

Adding to the woes, the country is kept in the dark about the number of people pushed below the poverty line due to demonetisation and implementation of GST. Such kneejerk reactions and macro-reforms affecting the most vulnerable ones are not a sign of a welfare state.

Amidst this, the Indian electorate consisting of 'chai-wallahs' and 'pakoda-sellers' have resigned to the failure in safeguarding worker rights for some 30-35% of workers has been a chronic problem for all governments. They should provide views that might have been previously ignored or not pondered upon. When people responsible for debate at the highest-level start discussing 'chai' and 'pakoda,' indirectly being impertinent to the unemployed as well as to the informal activity of selling snacks, then our policies will reflect similar discord.

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and visionaries should remember that history is never created by rewriting books, but by betterment of present and future generations.

The real discovery of India lies in giving a chance to the informal workers to formalise their expertise and opportunities for moving upward through economic wellbeing. It dwells in giving them a sense of confidence in a real shining India, where subsidies are not doled out in budgets before the election. Let's not forget that in the art of debate lies the nuances of sharpened vision, where both the government and opposition hold uniform accountability.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Jindal Global Business School, Sonipat, Haryana)
did what BJP's uproar could not