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Forget Jai Ho; Chant Bharat Bachao!

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By Naresh Minocha, Consulting Editor

INDIA has always been at a war with itself. The battlelines between different religions, castes, states and regions fester like eyesores during the elections. The fissures do not disappear after the elections.

They instead continue to widen and deepen during the interregnum. The legislatures, the governments and the opinion leaders nurture the divide in the Indian society during the public discourse till the next elections.

They all do this in the name of social justice especially when it comes to the issue of dividing the spoils system. The spoils include reservations at work-places and educational institutions, river-water sharing between the States and dividing the States into smaller entities.

The political parties are now working out their formulae to cash in on the minority votes, caste votes, the Hinduvata votes, SC-ST factor, the other backward castes, etc. during the forthcoming 15 th Lok Sabha polls.

The divisive politics has already led to the break-up of opportunistic platform called United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which was contrived by so-called secular parties to capture power at the Centre in mid-2004.

A few parties such as the Congress, the CPM and the CPI have announced their elections manifestos, offering promises and blaming their respective opponents for the ills plaguing the

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nation. A few activists have unveiled their own agenda such as the 'health manifesto' by a non-government organization (NGO).

**All have skirted the core issues that threaten to intensify the war within the Indian society, leave aside suggesting a way-out of the present failing system. The Indian political and governance system can at the best be described as a functional anarchy for the *Aam Adami*.**

It is, of course, a vibrant democracy for the power-seekers, brokers and other influential sections of the society that have been benefited from the Indian political and governance system.

The Congress party has thus not only latched on the Hollywood-certified Jai Ho! slogan but also contrived the catchline - **Aam Aadmi Ke Badhte Kadam; Har Kadam Par Bharat Buland.**

A mainline English daily is carrying its news and analysis under the catchline Dance of the Democracy. A political commentator has visualized the Lok Sabha polls as boisterous celebration of democracy.

**The five major stakeholders/pillars of the Indian system are politicians, government officials including policemen, advocates and judges, journalists and NGOs.**

Leaving aside self-effacing Karam Yogis in each of these five pillars of so-called democracy, all have otherwise contributed to the present crisis.

Here is a snapshot of democracy or the crisis: the Indian population has increased from 36.1 crore in 1951 to 114 crore at present. The number of poor people, famished people, malnourished people, disabled people has increased manifold in spite of all economic growth and innumerable government programmes to uplift the weaker sections of the society.

Is it not a national shame that as many as 30% of the babies are born under-weight. And 47% of children below the age of three are underweight. 74.3% of children in the same age group have anaemia. The official statistics on other issues such as Vitamin A deficiency and iodine deficiency disorders are equally pathetic.

Here is a take from the manifesto of CPM, the fallen out partner of United Progressive Alliance (UPA): 230 million people are undernourished, more than half of the India 's women are anaemic, 40% children under three years are underweight, 39% of adult population is illiterate, 219,000 habitations (presumably villages) have no access to clean drinking water.

Poverty and ineffective vigilance at national borders have led to sea-changes in the demography of States such as Assam . Kashmir Pandits and Assamese are becoming refugees in their own motherland!

Unabated growth in population and poverty is bound to intensify migrations to islands of prosperity such as Delhi and Mumbai, leading to social tensions, crime and chaos.

**The number of beggars and other homeless migrants in Delhi probably outnumber the**

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## Hindu and Sikh refugees who arrived from Pakistan following the Partition!

As it is, the North-East region remains alienated from the mainstream India and serves as cauldron of socio-economic tensions for a variety of reasons. Naxalites call shots in large swathes of land in more than half a dozen States. Pak-sponsored terrorists can strike at will, be it Parliament, be it Taj Mumbai.

The country is a fertile ground for breeding poverty because none of the five pillars of democracy has catalyzed a decisive campaign for population control. The National Population Commission headed by the Prime Minister has not met for several years. The commission website talk of current events as the ones held in 2001! Our beloved Prime Minister, of course, has had the time tour the world all these years!!

We all know that the population explosion is the mother of almost all problems – be it food shortage, energy shortage, housing shortage, water shortage, healthcare shortage and so forth.

It is the population explosion that is straining all resources including environment. It is population explosion that is magnifying the joblessness. It is population explosion that is feeding the crime wave across the country.

A common citizen is today scared of seeking justice from the regulatory and judicial system. He prefers to suffer in silence or commit suicide. A lot has been said about the decay and the delays in the criminal judicial system by different courts. No solution is, however, in sight.

There is a conspiracy of silence among the opinion leaders over the virtual black-out of the need for strict population control in the election manifestos? Ditto for uniform civil code, uniform religious code, media responsibility code and judiciary accountability code. We need many more such uniform norms on other counts too to restore Aam Aadami's eroding faith in democracy.

What is the guarantee that the functional anarchy would not degenerate into civil war or drive the country the Soviet Union way?

Why cannot the five pillars of Indian democracy start seeing and treating each and every citizen as Indian and nothing more and nothing less?

Is there no alternative to the Indian constitution and the so-called Indian democracy?

Why can't India adopt the Chinese model of governance and socio-economic justice? Why can't the Indian democracy be transformed into a Presidential form of the Government as in the U.S. ? Why can't the country produce an enlightened dictator?

Why is it that those who swear by democracy shy away from referendum on core issues such as one child per couple, one spouse for each adult, mandatory management of all religious places by independent, secular trusts, mandatory pooling of certain percentage of all religious offerings for setting up of healthcare facilities in all villages?

The referendum agenda can be enlarged.

Should the Supreme Court and High courts hear cases on dogs, gay rights, etc. on priority when innumerable cases of socio-economic exploitation are pending for years?

Should the NGOs such as People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) hijack the national agenda? Why can't India support real PETA- People for Equal Treatment of all animals including mosquitoes? After all both, dogs and mosquitoes bite human beings and the bite can be fatal in both cases. Does the Indian constitution discriminate between a dog and a mosquito?

Why should a secular Government only subsidize Haj pilgrimage and not similar pilgrimages of persons of other faiths? Should a government spend money on religious activity or on initiatives to save the life of malnourished babies, prevent polio, prevent night blindness, etc?

There are many other issues that ought to be decided by the people through the referendum and not by those win elections in which half the electorate simply do not vote.

It is here pertinent to quote a public trust that is strong votary of referendum. The People First Trust has recalled the colonial background of the Indian constitution and how it was imposed on the people. It says: "The legitimacy of the Constitution, authenticated in the name of the people in violation of their trust, is questionable."

**The fact that the Constitution has been amended so many times is itself a justification for referendum on the new constitution. Let the Supreme Court show its judicial activism where it is desperately needed.**

It should order the Government to facilitate drafting of the new constitution, following intensive discussion and feedback. Subsequently, the finalized constitution should be put through referendum. The draft constitution should stipulate that every subsequent amendment should be put to referendum.

Several countries including island state of Maldives have held referenda to adopt new constitution. Other nations hold referendum on major issues faced by them? What stops the world's second largest democracy from acting democratically? India system should save Bharat that has the potential to lead the world.

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Sub: **Good suggestion**

The message is very clear. This is a really thought provoking article. But the problem with having a referendum in a democratic country like India is that not all people can voice their opinion, as large number of people of this country are illiterate and the cost of holding referendum is also to be looked into. Any

suggestion on these practicalities, please.

Posted by

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