

Republic Day, Sovereignty and the Youth

Prem Singh

(The narrative of Republic Day and Sovereignty, which started changing with the implementation of New Economic Policies in 1991 and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, has reached its destination on the 75th Republic Day. The corporate-communal nexus defines the Indian republic and sovereignty today. This paradigm shift is being praised all around. Following comment was written on the occasion of 68th Republic Day – 26 January 2017. The same is again released to the youth of the country for their serious consideration.)

The Constitution of India was adopted on 26th Jan 1950 and we entered the world stage as a sovereign republic. Ever since 26 January is celebrated as the Republic Day, a celebration of our sovereignty. Vibrant tableaux of various states and departments are part of the parade. But predominantly it is a celebration of the display of military prowess. On careful observation you will find that after the adoption of the new economic policies in 1991—that is after the ruling classes compromised the economic sovereignty of the nation—the celebration of Republic Day has become more and more extravagant. During the past three decades, as political sovereignty got compromised along with economic sovereignty, the celebratory extravaganza of Republic Day on Rajpath reached its zenith.

The question is whether our sovereignty has also come of age with the coming of age of these exhibitionist celebrations? A quick look at the decisions taken in the wake of the neoliberal order makes it clear that the ruling classes have derailed governments from the axis of the Constitution, which embodies our sovereignty; and instead mounted them on the axis of neoliberalist institutions of global capital order like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation etc. These agreements and decisions have been taken at the behest of global capitalist economic institutions to further the interests of national and international corporate houses, multinational companies and the likes. The current leadership, which claims that nothing has been done in the last 70 years, has shown remarkable promptness in compromising national sovereignty in just two and a half years of office. They have no concept of either freedom or of the sacrifices made by people in the struggle to achieve freedom for the country, hence they do not care if sovereignty is lost. This is also the problem with Narasimha Rao (the then prime minister), Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi. Only then did they transform the party of freedom struggle into a party that mortgaged country's freedom.

The ruling class presents military power as the symbol of the nation's sovereign power. But it is a false reassurance given that now there is 100 percent foreign direct investment in Defense, and the concessions have been given to America to interfere in our defence apparatus. Governments, especially the current government, whip up nationalistic hysteria to mislead the people, so that they are unable to see or comprehend the treason against constitutional sovereignty. The nationalist sentiment is usually whipped up against Pakistan, the country the Indian army has always had the wherewithal to defeat. Several thousand square kms of Indian territory is under Chinese control. The ruling classes never invoke nationalism for a military solution to that. All in all, the spectacle parade at the Republic Day has become a comprehensive exercise by the ruling classes, its civil society and the common masses to fill the void resulting from the loss of sovereignty. The more the neoliberal noose tightens around sovereignty, the more extravagant this display will be. Jingoistic nationalism will get more jingoistic.

This situation is tremendously knotted and depressing. But it also presents an opportunity to salvage and strengthen the sovereignty achieved after a long struggle. Especially to the young. The youth in India do not come from any one domain. There are distinct economic, social and educational domains. Across all these three domains, there is a huge army of educated, semi-educated and uneducated unemployed youth. The youth have different perspectives regarding the nation and their place in it. They don't necessarily even have the same point of view about the neoliberal assault on national sovereignty. Most, though, want to see India as a superpower. Some indeed believe that it already is one.

The youth must understand that a nation which cedes its sovereignty can never become a superpower. They can attempt the difficult visualization that in the neoliberal order, private enterprises will also have their tableaux in the Republic Day parade in future. The 100 percent foreign/ private investment in Defense will also have an imprint on the parade. They must think if it is acceptable to them? Will they want a share in the neo-imperialist/neoliberal nation? Or will they carry out their responsibilities in the sovereign Indian nation? The nation's sovereignty can only be saved if the nation's youth resolve to save it with new preparedness and understanding.

(The writer associated with the socialist movement is a former teacher of Delhi University and a fellow of Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla)