CONCLUSION

Today, we have entered a phase of human history when long-cherished ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity appear increasingly difficult to realise. It is only in recent decades that the democratic framework for delivering the goods is being questioned.

India is one of the few countries that had consciously chosen a democratic form of government and followed the choice with a series of progressive measures meant to empower the people. On examination it is clear that India has fallen short of realizing what it had set out to achieve. It is the same state of affairs with many other countries claiming to be democracies. There has never been a time when democracy has not been at crossroads. As we have moved further into the twenty-first century, democracy has entered a period of prolonged crisis. As a system of conducting human affairs, it is being viewed with increasing uncertainty.

There are red-letter days in the history of mankind, which are marked as most important and significant in all countries by all people. Such a day is 15th August 1947, as far as India is concerned. That day democracy was bestowed on it after the freedom of the country from the shackles of foreign subjugation. There rose the gigantic Indian population aspiring the way of new life, of genuine freedom, social justice, peace and well being of the entire mass of Indian population without any caste, class and ethnic discrimination and distinction and based on the cardinal principle of social equality surcharged by the spirit of patriotism and oneness for entire geographical mass of the Indian subcontinent.
Now, in the 21st century, India is trying to emerge as a major player on the world scene. If all goes well, it may succeed in its efforts in a couple of decades. Perhaps, India could have moved at a faster pace; maybe, it could have achieved more if occasional hurdles along the way had not slowed down the process. Yet, whatever, it has achieved so far has surprised even those in the world who enjoyed harbouring doubts about its survival as one nation beyond a few years after independence. The “Dangerous Decades” are far behind us as the world’s largest democracy is poised to take major strides during the next few years.

After years of sluggishness, the nation’s economy is growing at a rate which is making the world repose confidence in India’s ability to achieve more in not too distant a time. The country is self-sufficient in meeting many of its needs. More people are having a better standard of living than ever before.

However, to believe that all is well with the land will be a folly. India is reluctant to shed a lot of baggage of the past; population is still rising at an alarming rate; the gains of growth of the economy are not reaching all the people; not all children are going to school; and not everyone has access to healthcare. There are a large number of people who cannot afford to have the daily nutrition. In hundreds and thousands of villages even clean drinking water is not available. Housing is meant for a lucky few. In most villages and towns the jobless – in numbers – are adding to the despair which is not tackled, can undo the hopes of even a ‘Shining India’. Sena Wars in Bihar, and the growth of naxalism and violence in many parts of the country are only a few of the portents the country has to contend with.

What is worrying more is the health of the institutions that are supposed to guide the affairs of the nation and take India forward towards a
better future. These institutions were created by the Founding Fathers of the republic with the fond hope that they will serve the people for a long time, change their lives in a big way and build India into a major nation-state in the not too distant future.

Unfortunately, the very structures that had been conceived for promoting the democratic process and providing liberation from traditional constraints – political parties, representative institutions and the judiciary – are becoming vulnerable to the influence of anti-democratic forces.

From the 1980’s crime and violence have been on the uprising. The lower classes and the vulnerable strata of society – women, poorer strata of dalits and Muslims, those engaged in exposing societal malaise and therefore drawn towards military – have suffered severely, sometimes even physical dismemberment and death. Individual safety and security have declined precipitously. Goonda raj is on the rise and is often promoted by the strong men of politics.

The performance of democratic institutions during the past five decades is not what it ought to have been. Parliament, after a great initial start, is becoming less vigilant and effective in defending the rights of the people or giving them a constructive lead; the administration by habit remains distant and callous towards most people whom it should serve. Parliamentary politics have failed to reflect public opinion or decisively respond to conditions of growing agony and alienation. Today, one notices a certain cynicism towards parliamentary institutions and erosion in the respect for normal parliamentary processes and the parliamentarians. We have an unending debate in regard to the falling standards in the conduct of legislators. Legislatures having members with criminal records, sale and purchase of legislators to obtain majority and stay in power or somehow
come to power, mortgaging the interests of the nation and of future generations for self-interests in the business of power politics are the most common topics of popular discussion today. The people feel helpless. There can be nothing sadder or more dangerous than the representative credentials of the representatives, with some honourable exceptions, becoming suspect and an increasing alienation taking place between the people and their representatives with the representatives losing the respect of the people.

Very little effort seems to have been made to examine and analyse what really plagues Parliament or to find out the reasons for the erosion of the traditional authority, high esteem and pristine glory of the institution of Parliament. Perhaps, something can still be done to restore the legislatures and legislators to their old glory and bring about a renaissance of democratic faith and parliamentary culture.

Members irrespective of their party affiliations have themselves become a new caste, parts of the establishment and co-sharers in the spoils. Again, some honourable exceptions apart, politics and membership of Parliament have emerged as a whole time, highly lucrative, hereditary profession for a majority of those involved. There is general apathy among members, ministers and the public at large in the work of Parliament.

We must deliberate on the highest priority basis why things have come to such a pass and what can be done to restore the legislatures and legislators to their old glory and bring about a renaissance of democratic faith and parliamentary culture.

Parliament has a decisive role in refashioning the national economy, keeping in the forefront the ideals of a self-reliant economy that serve the real needs and aspirations of our vast masses. Parliament can play this
historic role only if it consciously reforms its procedures and priorities in its work.

Besides adequate efforts have to be made to develop the essential prerequisites for the success of parliamentary polity—discipline, character, high sense of public morality, ideology oriented parties and willingness to hear and accommodate minority views. Several of the archaic practices and time consuming procedures most unsuitable for present—day needs have to be changed.

For, Parliament, it is of the utmost importance constantly to review and refurbish its structural-functional requirements and from time to time to consider renewing and reforming the entire gamut of its operational procedures to guard against putrefaction and decay.

Parliament in the future would be relevant only as a dynamic institution ever adjusting its functions and procedures to the changing needs of the times. If democracy and freedom are to endure, if representative institutions are to be made impregnable, it is essential to restore to Parliament and its members their traditional esteem and honour in the affections of the people.

Parliamentary reforms would have to include: building a better image of Parliament as belonging to the people and not to the MPs and establishing a new rapport between the people and Parliament; improving the quality and conduct of members; reducing expenditure on Parliament and making membership financially less attractive and more motivated by the spirit of sacrifice and service; quashing forthwith the unconstitutional MPLAD Scheme; improving information supply and efficacy of committee scrutiny; legislative planning and improving the quality of laws; codifying privileges;
improving working of parties, floor management and parliamentary time table; and rationalizing and modernizing rules of procedures to meet today’s needs.

Finally, Parliamentary reforms would have to be part of an integrated approach to reforms in all sectors in education, judiciary, legislature, and administration. In fact Parliamentary institutions are very precious plants and unless nursed with care, they tend to wither away.

Governance has suffered because of the progressive deterioration in the functioning of the executive, the state legislatures and Parliament. The judiciary, which is last hope of the people, is not able to dispense justice to all. There is a fractured polity and multiparty government, being incapable of enforcing the much needed measures to provide good governance; deficiencies in the electoral system, which permit entry of corrupt/criminal elements; appalling inefficiency and unaccountability of the administrative apparatus all over the country; and widespread corruption at the political and administrative levels.

Most political parties have been found wanting. The Congress is yet to recover its lost bases in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and several other parts of the country – a major weakness for a pan-Indian ‘Political Party The BJP’s non-exclusive outlook as well as its lack of basic respect for minorities’ sensibilities and the norms that should guide a plural polity and society will always stem the party’s growth. The regional parties do not have the vision to lead an India of the 21st Century. Indeed, all the political parties seem to be similar in their style of functioning. Most are based on loyalty to leaders rather than loyalty to causes or institutions. Very few have properly institutionalized norms of recruitment and membership. And none has any real intra-party democracy. Democracy performs its most salient functions
through parties. The selection of candidates, the mobilisation of electorate, the formulation of agendas, the passing of legislation – are all conducted through parties. Parties are in short, the mechanism through which power is exercised in a democracy.

But lack of intra-party democracy procedures adverse outcomes for Indian democracy. The criteria for the basic decisions any party has to take, ranging from candidate selection to party platform, remain either unclear or left to the discretion of one or a handful of leaders. Poorly institutionalized intra-party democracy produces more factions. The fragmentation of the party system and the prospect of perpetual coalition governments; the weakening of democratic accountability despite high turn over of incumbents; the fact that political parties are unable to transcend their narrow social bases and become parties of principle; the diminishing quality of public deliberation in our politics – all have their roots, less in the failure of the constitution than in the party structures that have grown under it. Lack of intra-party democracy impedes proper representation rather than enhances it.

Political parties constitute and reflect the political forces of the society and act as a significant variable among the forces shaping the political system. They have come to be treated as ‘inevitable organisational system’ in a democratic polity and considered to be both desirable and essential mechanism for giving expression to the feelings and aspirations of people.

Political parties thus have come to occupy a very important place in the functioning of political systems all over the world. Their role has emerged as a force of considerable magnitude, which shapes the political processes and systems, and both democratic and authoritarian political systems are no exception to it. They also act as carriers of public opinion and
exercise pressure on the governing system to convert the demands and aspirations of people in public policy.

Political parties in a democracy are essentially concerned with the process of electioneering and acquisition of power. The system of elections in a democracy constitutes the backbone of a democratic polity and acts as a process through which the political opinion of the public is shaped, directed and concretized in the formation of the ‘General Will’. Parties are the key instrumentality for operationalization of the process and can contribute a lot in maintaining the sensitive balance amongst social forces. It is, therefore, expected of the parties to adopt an approach and strategy which does not militate against the basic goals of polity i.e. maintenance and preservation of order in society and even development of societal forces. But the electoral process has come to be vitiated on account of different pulls and pressures and negative postures of the parties with respect to issues on which there should be normally be consensus. Among the different forces which have shaped the electoral process and acted as bases of election policies are growing role of money and muscle power which constitute the major sources of threats to polity as such and maintenance of law and order in particular.

Parties in India have thrown up some kind of youthful leadership which is dedicated to the service of nation, but the increasing proportion of criminal elements getting nominated and elected on behalf of some of the parties. Indian Politics thus increasingly has come to be characterized by what is known as ‘Criminalisation of Politics’ resulting in a lot of political violence throughout the country. Similarly, electoral process has also been castigated on account of the growing use of money as the most important factor for winning elections. All political activities, especially elections are being increasingly financed by those forces which have a vested interest. This is, unfortunately, a very disturbing trend is likely to pose a serious
problem to those who want to contest elections for considerations of ideology and service to the nation. Black money has emerged as the mainspring of electoral politics and our political parties both ruling and opposition tend to rely heavily on it.

Politics of elections in India has also been largely governed by extra political considerations of caste, religion and language. Parties have often tended to exploit the sentiments of people for all such considerations with the result that ideology has got a back seat. This has been evident right from the stage of nomination of candidates to election campaign and voter mobilization. The net result has been subversion of the democratic process to petty electoral gains and this has also resulted on disturbance of the harmony in society.

Needless to say that a definite policy needs to be pursued by the government regarding the crisis being created on account of criminalization, castesim in politics. This can be possible only when all political parties rise above the petty considerations and enter the electoral fray with ideological motives. Parties can, however, make a beginning by adhering to a code of conduct as regards to wooing of voters. It requires a multi-pronged strategy on the part of political parties and government and calls for shaping of public opinion which can result the rise of anti-social forces in society.

Political parties are the most highly organised and vibrant tool of democracy in India and should at least agree on the fundamental values of democracy, socialism and secularism show concern for integrity and security of the country. Thus the first and foremost condition is evolution of a consensus on broad goals of the party in India and true adherence to them.
Political parties, both ruling and opposition shall also have to resist the temptation of using money and muscle power for electoral gains and pursue an approach which can motivate right thinking people to join the mainstream of politics. The political parties must include struggle against corruption in their manifestos.

The political parties are today organised not on any ideological basis but on personal or group basis. Dr. Radhakrishnan in this regard says: “Politics is after all a means to an end; it devises arrangements by which social and economic justice is secured for all. No democracy will be worth the name if it confines its activities only to enabling the elected representatives to squabble for power and jockey for positions and leaves the purposes of the state to be fulfilled by fits and starts.”¹ Today politics has ceased to be a means. It has become an end itself. We have today people who are engaged in power politics rather than aim at political power with a view to achieving certain social and national objectives.

Let the different political parties try to evolve a philosophy for themselves. Let them not be mere conglomerations of persons joined together for some selfish ends. It should be something different from a commercial undertaking or a joint stock company. It is also necessary that the philosophy of the party is not kept confined to the pages of the party manifesto. Members should understand it and devote themselves to translating it into action.

Worst things are happening and affecting the functioning of these institutions as well as the entire body politic. Despite the high aims enshrined in the Constitution, casteism is still afflicting India, may be more

¹ Quoted by Upadhyaya, Deendayal in Political Diary (New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 1972), (Second Edition), p. 156.
seriously corruption is eating into the vitals of the nation; and now the entry of criminals into politics; Parliament and State Assemblies has vitiated much of the political system.

India boasts of being the world’s largest democracy, with the passage of 73rd and 74th Amendments on Panchayati Raj, it can make the further claim of being the most-representative one, with over three million grassroot legislators being elected, a third of them women. The country has of course a strong democratic tradition of electoral politics. But democracy goes beyond periodic elections, despite their seminal importance in ensuring free and fair choice. What is more important is the participative nature and quality of democratic governance. It is here that the country needs to be vigilant to ensure that its parliamentary system is not hollowed by the criminalization of the political and electoral political process.

It is now common knowledge that a number of elected representatives to Local bodies, State Legislatures and even Parliament are persons of unsavoury reputation, and some of them hardened criminals. Alarmed by this trend the Supreme Court intervened a couple of years ago to order a disclosure regime that requires electoral candidates to make known their criminal record, if any, their assets and those of their immediate relatives, and their educational qualifications. The Central Election Commission worked out the related procedures and details. But, the scheme was unanimously opposed by all parties on grounds that ranged from its impracticality to the likely harassment of innocent persons that it could cause. The Election Commission laid down a protocol for disclosure of assets for the 2004 polls. This experiment evoked a very good public response and civil society groups set up a National Election watch with regional/state units, to build local awareness about the new disclosure regime, interact with Election Commission with regard to drawing up the
forms, collecting the information as disclosed by the candidates and then analyzing them for the benefit of the media, local communities, political parties and others. Besides, the newly legislated Right to Information Act will also promote a greater degree of transparency and accountability if implemented in letter and spirit.

Caste and communal factors and feudal mindsets are also instrumental in subverting democratic norms and restraints. The sordid story of Dalit oppression and tribal exploitation bears the markings of a subtle criminalization of politics. These too must be countered. Democracy is too precious gift to be squandered or subverted by criminals. This is a battle that has to be collectively fought and won.

As we have injured ourselves we have no right to blame others. We have to fish out the defaulters and exemplarily punish them in the ambit of democracy. The prevailing corruption and criminalization is the end result of bad examples set by new democratic rajas. No wonder that the basic values of our culture enshrined in Dharma or the noble eight-fold path of Mahatma Buddha and even teachings of Gandhi have become a matter of mere rhetoric.

The first essential prerequisite to root out corruption from the country is to bring clean men on the top in the political field, corrupt political leaders are the main spring of corruption. This is the obligation of the Indian electorate, because in a democratic set up, people get a government they deserve. Happily there is a growing consciousness in this regard in some seers, saints and scholars of the country. They educate the people and persuade them to give greater importance to the character and reputation of the candidates than to their parties. A government of clean, honest and patriotic people is the first necessity to clean the augean stables. Only then it
can take steps to reform the educational and economic policies and electoral system.

It is the moral and bounden duty of all patriots and well-wishers of our ancient land to rise above petty, parochial, personal and partisan considerations to make a concerted and united effort to set things right before it is too late. As it is, the nation and its citizens are on the brink of anarchic and chaotic conditions, which are the direct consequences of the all pervading and permeating monster of corruption.

Mahatma Gandhi said, "Corruption will be out one day. However, one may try to conceal it, and the public can, as it is its right and duty, in every case of justifiable suspicion, call its servants to strict account, dismiss them, sue them in a law court or appoint an arbitrator or inspector to scrutinize their conduct, as it likes."\(^2\)

"Corruption will go when the large number of persons given to the unworthy practice realize that the nation does not exist for them, but they for the nation. It requires a high code of morale, extreme vigilance on the part of those who are free from corrupt practice and who have influence over corrupt servants."\(^3\)

Thus we must follow the advice of Mahatma Gandhi to root out corruption from the country. He advised that 'sleepless vigilance' on the part of citizens was the only and most effective course of action to fight corruption. It is the people who have to fight it out and remain ever vigilant; it is they who can work as real watchdogs. The security environment of this country is the greatest cause of concern. We must become strong from within and strengthen our democratic institutions. It is therefore, the

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 344.
responsibility of all of us, wherever we may be whether in politics or outside it, in cities or villages to fight the forces bent on India’s destruction.

The Indian political system can have corruption free governance only when the lawmakers do not themselves become lawbreakers. The Vohra Committee Report had highlighted one negative aspect of our politics namely the criminalization of politics. So if we want to start a process by which we will be able to achieve corruption-free government, where the law makers play a very effective role in achieving this objective, it is necessary that we should first take steps to ensure that the law breakers and criminals do not become law-makers.

Today there is a need of mobilisation of the youth if we have to fight corruption. It is said that the best way of influencing people is when they are young. Undoubtedly, early years in the life of a human being constitute the ideal period when values can be inculcated. That is why the responsibility of the educational institutions in this respect is great. We must systematically inculcate the right values on our youth so that at least in the next 20 years or so we can bring a basic change in the social perception about corruption.

The political leaders, administrators and other high officials must not gain financial and other material benefits for themselves or their official duties. The paramount guiding factor should be public interest and not private gain. The action must be free from nepotism and favouritism. They must be honest and upright in their dealings without accepting any obligations from anyone prejudicial to the official conduct. They must not allow anyone to influence them in the performance of their official duties. The public officials must be efficient, transparent and accountable to public. All actions of theirs must be subjected to public scrutiny.
Further, they must follow the objectivity. The action must be well reasoned out without personal predilections. Merit must be the criteria to award contracts and appoint staff. Their actions must be transparent. Nothing should be done in secrecy. Peoples’ right to information must be honoured. Reasons must be given for a decision.

Above all, they must understand the Gandhian Principle that they are servants of nation and they should have the quality of ‘Self-sacrifice’.

The ‘Truth Commission’ should be constituted to prepare a code of ethics for leaders and administrators. Requiring a declaration of property owned, on oath, of which the accuracy would be verified. Leaders who declare the whole truth would be allowed to retain their properties otherwise would be forfeited on false declarations.

If we want to make things happen, we must first have belief that they can happen. If we have a vision of a corruption-free India and even though we may all be living in a corrupt India, if we go on removing from the system, whatever is coming in the way of corruption-free India, then we are bound to achieve success.

The Indian Constitutional system envisages a majoritarian form of Parliamentary Government in India at the Centre and the States more or less like the British. However the political reality has brought about multiple parties resulting in governments of party coalitions or alliances.

In coalition politics, the leader of the leading party is usually elected as the leader of the parliamentary party of the coalition, but he shall be acceptable to the allies as well. Sometimes the leaders of a minority party may be chosen by the coalition to head the Cabinet. It is generally observed that the general elections to the Parliament or the State legislature is today
the occasion for electing the Prime Minister/Chief Minister also, as the whole election process is centered around the leader of the party or alliance of parties. But in a coalition set up the post election situations can upset the earlier arrangements.

In coalition politics in India the Ministers are chosen by the respective parties themselves, and the Prime Minister/Chief Minister may not have a say in normal circumstances. This situation further weakens the position of the Prime Minister/Chief Minister in relation to his/her own party, particularly if it is ridden with factionalism. There are instances of Prime Ministers and Chief Ministers being dictated to by factions in their own party about appointing some members as ministers or even about avoiding the appointment of somebody whom they do not like to be with them in the Cabinet.

Practically, coalition is a bargaining process between the partners, and the process is ongoing from the start to the finish. The representation of the partners in the Ministry, the allocation of proportionate seats and the distribution of portfolios among them often are the issues of serious bargaining. It often happens in India that the smaller parties plead for a disproportionately larger pay off in terms of the number and importance of positions, and they often succeed in winning them. This is particularly so when the leading party is dependent on the minor parties for the maintenance of the coalition. The minor partners seem to presume that it becomes solely the responsibility of the leading party to preserve the coalition and they behave in irresponsible ways very often. So to say, the leading party becomes the loser in the bargaining game, as it has to give up a part of its due share on order to satisfy the bullying partners.
As regards distribution of portfolios there is always fight for ‘plum posts’ like Finance, External Affairs, Railways and Defence at the centre and for similar prestigious portfolios in State Governments. Such distribution can be arranged to the satisfaction of all parties only by a process of negotiation and compromise. Any discontentment left in this regard may crop up again and create fresh crises now and then which may even lead to destruction of the coalition.

The demand for larger representation and better portfolios is likely to create massive Cabinet. The number of Ministers may go on increasing as the ‘accommodating spirit’ waxes. Once the Council of ministers is formed, there arises the problem of coordinating them and pulling them together. As they belong to different political parties, the Ministers may have different or even contradictory opinions, interests and visions. The foremost characteristic of a coalition ministry is the absence of political homogeneity.

In a Coalition Ministry consisting of several parties, there is no control single-party machinery which can control all of them. Ministers belong to several parties and their future political prospects rest with their own parties. In such circumstances it is quite rational to evolve a separate forum for bringing the coalition allies together to discuss policy matters. In other words, institutionalized bargaining structures become relevant in coalition politics.

The coalition partners, being participants in the government are supposed to provide it solidity and be collectively responsible for its performance. But being different in origin and character, they often make for dissent and mutual criticism. Thus a coalition government has also a built-in mechanism for mutual checks and balances. However, the actual performance of coalitions deviates from the idealistic vision of smooth
collaboration and friendly dissent. They sometimes break into open fights on the floor of the house and outside. Legislators speak in the language of the masses and behave in a style understandable to them.

Coalition involves a commitment on the part of the political parties concerned to implement a pragmatic common programme, however much ideologically at poles they are. It is apparent that in the present vortex of political relations in India coalitions are unavoidable. But the fact is that the Constitution is silent on coalition government. It does not contain the provisions which facilitate the formation of coalition governments. As today’s need is the coalition government in India because of emergence of various political parties, therefore, the provisions related to the coalition politics should be inserted in the Constitution through Constitutional amendment without compromising the spirit of parliamentary process. What should be the criteria of selecting the Prime Minister in case no party gets the majority to form the government? How the other members of cabinet would be given the main portfolios? These are the main issues which need the immediate attention and discussion so that some kind of coalition culture might be developed in the country.

There are certain suggestions to bring stability in the coalition politics:

- There should be pre poll alliances in the various political parties.

- The coalition culture should be developed in the country and each party should respect that culture and they should give up the narrow interests before the national interest i.e. the welfare and development of all, unity and integrity of the nation and not self-interest.
A common minimum programme acceptable to all or most parties should be placed before both the houses of Parliament and approved. Partners should agree on a common minimum programme of action, the implementation of which becomes the objective of sharing power. The common minimum programme becomes a common manifesto for all parties that join the coalition. It cannot be the sum total of all the manifestos of the individual parties which may include contradictory ideas and promises. The common minimum programme manifests compromise, and the minimum that the partners agree upon.

The Prime Minister should be elected by the Lok Sabha and shall resign only when an alternative leader is chosen.

A no-confidence motion passed against the government should be effective only after the elections of an alternative Prime Minister.

It has been established that communalism, and casteism are major threats to the nation. The communal violence and caste violence have grown inspite of the legal provisions underscores, not the inadequacy of the existing laws but their inefficacy as a deterrent in the prevalent political climate. The climate for communal violence has been created, with honourable exceptions, by leading political parties. When these parties are elected to office they use the State to actually formant communal violence and hatred. The massacre of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 was aided and abetted, if not actually sponsored, by those who wielded state power. More appalling were the victims being referred to as “refugees” when they were citizens. No less
horrendous was the 1984 genocidal killings of Sikhs in Delhi in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi’s assassination. The recurrent communal violence in the country is a product of the politics and the political parties collectively resolve to eschew divisive policies, hate politics and publicly name, shame and isolate communalist criminals, the violence and basis for conflict will not go away. Parliament must address the causes of communal violence and caste violence in country and save the democracy from going into peril.

While inaugurating the meeting of National Integration Council (NIC) (31st August 2005) in New Delhi Dr. Manmohan Singh said that communalism, casteism are threats to the nation and we have to deal them with firm action. He also asked every political group that claims to represent the interests of any section of the people must test and demonstrate its popularity through the institutions of our democracy.

The Prime Minister further added that while we promote national integration and our core value of tolerance, any convert challenges we face in the form of communalism, extremism, separatism and insurgency and violence need to be dealt with firmly.

Similarly, our democracy gives everyone the right to articulate that grievance in a democratic manner. No civilized society can tolerate violence and extremism. No one has the right to take the law into his or her own hands. No society can pardon those who kill innocent people. And, there is no grievance howsoever extreme and desperate that cannot be redressed through democratic means. Democracy allows us the freedom to espouse our cause and win people over to our point of view; the Prime Minister said addressing the NIC.
Moreover, listing communalism, casteism, regionalism and linguism, as identified by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, as the four threats to the basic principles of our Republic, Dr. Singh said that not only must we nip in the bud any attempt to disturb our secular fabric, we must actively promote the spirit of communal harmony.

Perhaps, their relative importance had altered and possibly declined over the years as our identity as a nation had grown. But it should remain our endeavour to find ways in which we can battle against these “incipient threats” to our national unity he said, “the ideologies of communalism, of casteism, of regional and linguistic chauvinism have to be fought in a more sustained and intelligent manner.... we need a more humane, inclusive and political culture and our social and family values must be rooted in our civilizational commitment to pluralism and liberalism.”

Accordingly, The Prime Minister rightly asked the Chief Ministers to invest in education, health, infrastructure, better governance and a transforming rural economy. “An improvement in the lives and livelihood of the rural poor is an important element of national integration.

It has been observed by many scholars that caste reservation is another ugly tool which the politicians use to capture the vote bank. The caste based reservation has not helped the sections like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes very much rather it has created the conflicts between those who are included and those who are excluded. Moreover, the material benefits to the lower castes have largely gone to their more advanced members, that some castes have benefited substantially,
others hardly at all, and that there are growing class divisions within each of the lower castes as the more successful individuals obtain positions in government while others receive among the lower castes have tended to use their positions for self benefit and to provide symbolic benefits to those who have been left behind. The system of reservations simply provides a window within which a small section of the lower castes can enter into the middle class.

Many liberals contend that reservation is fine so long as it is on the basis of economic, not social, backwardness. Following the “Creamy Layer” judgement of the Supreme Court, there are no doubts that a wealthy Harijan should not be granted special favours when it comes to obtaining a government job or admission to an educational institution. Even in the bastion of free expertise Capitalism, the US Government has possibly done more in terms of affirmative action than we have in this country e.g. a minimum of 5 per cent of all purchases made by the American Government has to come from the supplies belonging to minority communities.

The Government at the Centre and in the States should help the socially and educationally disadvantaged sections by extending all kinds of facilities like scholarships, books, coaching and training so that they can upgrade their skills and are capable of competing with others for admission to speciality courses purely on merit. In tune with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s suggestion for affirmative action in the private sector, the confederation of Indian Industry which is against quotas, is preparing a blue print on how to help the socially and educationally disadvantaged. The CII is exploring proposals like setting up of scholarships, vocational institutes and self-help groups for them. The Centre and the states too should think on similar lines. Ultimately, the need of the hour is to train and empower them instead of doling out quotas for narrow partisan ends. Politics should look
beyond the vote bank, if we wish to make India a developed nation by 2020. Excellence can be accomplished, if we do not get involved in messy caste politics.

The resilience of our democracy, a robust Constitutional order, a trillion dollar economy and an unshakable resolve of billion people to bond together in harmonious co-existence testify to our potential as a nation. But while on the move, we must constantly remind ourselves of the inalienable principles of Republic and our obligations as citizens to ensure the sustenance of our core values.

The nation’s moral code of Satyamev Jayate and the spirit of nationalism immortalized in our national song Vande Matram must define the national endeavour in all spheres. The present generation and those to follow must be made to group the message of the thought that defines the spirit of free India.

Those responsible for charting the nation’s future must be men and women of substances, possessed of wisdom, intellectual, integrity and physical capacity to strengthen the foundations of our democracy. We need to create a national ambience in which integrity; intellect and industry are rewarded at all levels and in all disciplines so as to ensure our collective empowerment as a nation.

By recognizing and asserting in their conduct the continued relevance of Gandhi’s code of political morality, political formations of all hues would rid our electoral process and democratic institutions of the many aberrations that denude the strength of our democracy.

By fostering respect for informed discussion, freedom of expression and conscientious dissent in the best traditions of constitutional democracy,
we would have strengthened our polity thereby enabling a billion people to realise their potential and that of their country.

Despite significant achievements as a nation, disease, impoverishment, unemployment and illiteracy on a vast scale are our real challenges. They need to be confronted and vanquished by according foremost priority to gainful employment for the youth, education and basic health care for all its citizens.

We need to secure a national consensus on ways to combat terrorism in all its manifestations. These must remain the non-negotiable priorities of the nation not be subordinated to partisan impulses. The unanimous support to the UPA Government’s National Employment Guarantee Act (NEG) and the Right to Information (RTI) – major initiatives in the cause of national empowerment – is a welcome sign. We must likewise ensure that conflicts over sharing of the nation’s water resources do not weaken our federal structure and unity as a nation.

National glory demands of its leaders sagacity, tolerance and courage of conviction to shed an obsession with electoral victories for their own sake. Transient and fragile majorities cobbled together through unprincipled compromises cannot subserve the aspirations of a resurgent nation. The people of India must choose that we do not wobble inconclusively inside the polling booths.

India’s claim to glory is its abiding commitment to the rule of law which presupposes that the legitimacy of the exercise of power is determined with preference to the ends to which it is applied. The State must bring to the centre of its concern those existing on the margin, in support of its reason to be. This will be possible only when the citizens at large are enabled to
question any dereliction of duty or transgression of its authority by the State. We need to ensure that our politicians and civil servants do not bend backwards to satiate the ambitions of the powerful but are dedicated to ensuring the vindication of public interest in all its dimensions.

Above all we need benign and rational laws which are fairly and justly applied and followed. For the edifice of our representative democracy to be strengthened, the fine balance of sovereign power between the three organs of the state must be protected and preserved.

Corruption on a vast scale and the concomitant prostitution of power are eating into the vitals of our nation. India can realise its potential only when we strive for zero tolerance of the abuse of authority and the corrupting of power. Above all, we must ensure the dignity of all our citizens. We cannot suffer the rich and powerful to demean the dignity of the less fortunate nor must we allow the arrogance of power and wealth to suborn the institutions of state. We must ensure that women are respected, the childhood of our children blooms and starvation deaths cease forever. We must ensure that our farmers feel secure in their future.

Civilised on national issues between leaders of political parties is an essential requirement of a healthy and functioning democracy. Unsubstantiated accusations of a personal nature against individual leaders in an idiom laced with intense acrimony and hostility do not auger well for the nation. Such avoidable and distasteful political discourse has compromised the functioning of our Parliamentary institutions.

The strengthening of our democracy in the service of the people of India demands a return to best traditions of Parliamentary democracy established by late Prime Minister Nehru. We must, thus, refine our political
discourse through the dignity of expression, high imagination, knowledge and intellectual integrity.

Our first Prime Minister Pandit Nehru used to communicate regularly with people and political leaders on issues of national importance. His response to the allegations against party MP, H. G. Mudgal, who took money from Bombay Bullion Merchants Association to lobby their case in Parliament, points to the power of dialogue. In a letter to Chief Ministers of the Union after the scandal broke out, Pandit Nehru wrote: “If once the reputation of our legislatures goes down, then democracy itself will be in peril. Any misbehaviour should lead to enquiry and action.” And action was taken. As the result the MP was thrown out of Parliament.

Finally, a presence for India on the high tale of world political order would to its pre-eminence attest. The journey to glory is indeed arduous and this we must undertake consistent with the moral code given to the nation by its founding fathers.