

Indefensible Political Acrimony

The public domain in India, arguably, has been increasingly filled with speech expressions that have become politically more acrimonious than ever before. Morally offensive language with no regard for gender dignity, social decency, and personal civility has become the order of the day. Such an acrimony that is reflected in the discussions in the electronic media, by implication, has led to exasperation in the culture of serious and robust debate. These archaic expressions have undermined the decency and decorum of democracy. This is thanks to a large section of the electronic media and malignant political interest of certain political parties, both of which seem to relentlessly use or support acrimony as the fodder on which the former then can feed their narrow interests. This, in effect, also seeks to expose the illusion that some of the leading political parties seem to have developed about themselves as the party that cares for a decent public sphere. Such parties have perceived themselves to be morally different from others in terms of setting higher standards of political practice that could assign a decent orientation to the conduct of politics.

However, the fundamental deficiency in such claims—as the party with a difference—lies in its ideological inability to give practical articulation to the commitment of creating a decent semantic field for civilised self or party expression. Put differently, the fundamental deficiency has to be understood in terms of the party's unwillingness to critically reflect on the acrimonious nature of social reality and inability to cast oneself in the transformative role that is necessary for changing reality in a more progressive direction. The fundamental deficiency thus exposes the lack of congruence between self-perception and self-expression of such parties and their supporters. On the contrary, it is quite astonishing to see that such parties take relief in “outsourcing” or supplementing such acrimonious and foul language to those who are seen doing the needful for them. However, on a moral/ethical ground, such parties cannot separate themselves from such acrimonious political expressions that one often hears.

Much against the moral claims that political parties make in regard to purifying politics, one can observe that such parties, together with the “contemner,” share the same morally porous ground. Those who use acrimonious language do not have their own normative criterion that could help the former to assign some degree of self-respect. Put differently, such “politicians” have

only one criterion of self-interest that motivates them to rule out the realisation of a morally minimal sense of self-degradation. Or such leaders perform with “innocence” in accepting their own degradation that cannot escape the critical gaze of the eyes of the public. The political parties concur with this singular criterion that is constitutive of self-interest.

Thus, mutually agreeable terms, such as mutual exploitation of each other, render political practice without merit. However, in one case, it is the ambition to fashion the country according to one's parochial political interest; the other is to achieve one's personal interest, of course, through the utilisation of the social resources. Arguably, some of the vulnerable members from the social margins as political entities will cease to have any use value if they were not to belong to a specific social background. For such members, what is social is politically available for personal appropriation and aggrandisement. The net result of such acrimonious political “trade-off” is that the limits of the “contemner” or the “spoiler” and their patron tend to eliminate any possibility of generating decent politics. In other words, the moral limits of the parties are coterminous with the limits of the candidate. The political party's intention to rely on the “contemner's” capacity to be acrimonious makes these limits coterminous. Hence, such parties cannot morally separate from the “demerits” of the candidates that are accommodated in existing opportunity structures. Merit, in moral terms, could be defined as ennobling democracy with decency and decorum, but ends up the casualty in such instrumentalisation and mutual objectification promoted by power politics.

The democratic public sphere is supposed to regulate the direction of judgment and its normative outcome based on merit. Political parties should take such a judgment to promote merit among the leaders who participate in democratic decision-making. The state, through constitutional injection, is supposed to control political acrimony, but to perform such an important function, it has to be morally committed to act in accordance with the Constitution. However, when the state becomes either indifferent to such acrimony or, at times, actively supports such an acrimonious political culture, then it raises a serious challenge to the future of decent democracy.

