

Address of Dr A P J Abdulkalam, former President of India, at 2<sup>nd</sup> National Voters' Day function at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi  
(25<sup>th</sup> January 2012)

## Youth: Architects of the 21st century Democracy

*Making the nation great,  
Is in our hands*

I am delighted to participate in this National Voters' Day programme organized by Election Commission of India which coincides with the foundation day of the Election Commission. My greetings to all of you.

Friends, as you are all aware, India has traveled for over six decades as the largest democracy in the world by giving leadership to one billion plus people with multi-culture, multi-religious and multi-lingual affiliations. India has developed its core-competence in Agriculture, Textile, ICT, Oil and Gas, Pharma, Space, Defence, and Energy. Still we feel we are very young in democracy and our democracy has stood steadfast in its critical times.

### Growth in Indian Electoral system

In 2009, when the nation held general elections to the 15th Lok Sabha in five phases, we had an electoral strength of 714 million which is larger than the European Union and United States put-together. Elections indeed are the defining moments of the nation's future. I am happy that we have assembled here to felicitate and give away elector's photo identity card, which empowers every citizen to elect the right candidate as his representative in the Parliament or Assembly who will constantly work for realizing the growth, prosperity and peace of the nation. Today I would like to share my views on the topic "**Youth: Architects of the 21st century Democracy**".

### Youth participation in electoral process

Friends, India is a nation, which is considered to be youngest in its demographics. We have about 550 million youth in the nation and about 200 million are registered electorates. In the future, the number of youth voters and their relative share will only grow progressively. In this scenario, it is paramount for the efficiency of the democracy to ensure that these youth are an integral and vibrant part of the democratic participation. How do we motivate the youth to be partners in the democratic elections? How do we motivate others who don't vote normally due to various other reasons?

### Dynamics of election process

During the last six decades, India has witnessed a change in both quality and quantity of operations in the election process. The voting process has moved from the balloting system to marking system and then gradually to the present system based on electronic voting machines. Multi member constituencies have given way to single member constituency. Printed electoral roles have now been substituted by computerized photo electoral roles. The electors photo

identity card, a cherish possession of all citizens has been issued to over 630 million voters. In this process, I have a vision.

### **My visualization of Elections**

I visualize an election scenario, where a candidate files his nomination from a particular constituency. Immediately the election officer verifies his or her authenticity from the Unique Identification Number database containing biometric and other data through multifactor authentication.

The education credentials of the candidate come from the university records. Candidate's track record of employment comes from various employers with whom the candidate had worked. His or her income and wealth resources come from the income-tax department, and other sources. Candidate's property record comes from the registration of land authority across the country. Candidate's credit history comes from various credit institutions like banks. Candidate's civic consciousness and citizenship behaviour comes from the police crime record. Candidate's legal track records come from the judicial system.

All the details arrive at the computer terminal of the election officer within few seconds automatically by the act of e-Governance software agents which crawls across the various state and central government web services directories through the network GRID and collects the information automatically and presents the facts in real-time without any bias. Artificial intelligence software analyses the credentials of the candidate and gives a rating on how successful he or she will be as a politician. Election officer sitting at the remote block of the country decides on the spot and the election process starts. All the voters vote from their home through virtual polling booths. If we consider the breakthroughs and expansion in telecommunication and internet in the last decade, this visualization is no longer a dream and is possible to be achieved by our democratic country.

To establish a system what I have visualized, we need a high bandwidth broadband connectivity across the many Government departments such as State and District Administration, Election commission, Universities, Banks, Home - Police Departments, Insurance companies etc., This scenario requires vertical and horizontal e-Governance grid established across various institutions and the Government. Hence, we can draw information and feed information from these GRIDs for seamless flow of data to achieve the goal of good governance. I am confident, the Election Commission in partnership with other arms of the government will workout such a scheme which will enable the voters to vote from their homes.

This technology interface will not only save costs but also enable a larger participation with the confidence of safety, secrecy and transparency. Availability of system such as emails, IVRS (Interactive Voice Response System) based platforms or SMS (short messaging service and MMS (Multi Media Service) and 3G will facilitate faster implementation of my visualization.

### **Dream of the Youth of the Nation**

Friends, I have so far met 13 million youth of the nation in about a decade's time. One message, I have got from them which I want to share with all of you. The message is, that the youth want

to live in an economically developed state and thereby a developed nation. I am conveying their aspirations towards the political leaders, *"we, the youth, have decided to elect Members of the Parliament and Members of State Legislatures, only if they have proved to have contributed to the economic development of the constituency, state and the nation in their previous tenure. For the new entrants to politics, they should possess a track record of selfless, committed and honest service to the community where they reside or they work"*. Youth want to see elected members as their role models in performance in the Parliament or State Assembly, and also in their way of leading the life with integrity and succeeding with integrity.

The youth, definitely, expect the elected representatives to ensure that the performance of the Parliament and State Assemblies are never disturbed or halted and youth consider this action of non-performance as a crime and a wasteful process. The citizens expect that availability time in the Houses is fully utilized for drawing up vision for the nation, making laws and discussing and finding solutions to our national and regional problems. Above all the youth of the nation, desire their representatives to follow the mission of developmental politics.

### **Political Politics vs. Development Politics**

Now I would like to discuss what I have presented in the Parliament during the award ceremony to outstanding parliamentarians, on 21 March 2005 on the topic Political Politics vs. Development Politics and stressed how important it is for the members of the Parliament to work 70% of their time, on developmental politics, that is, economic development of their constituencies.

When I saw the members of the largest democracy, I shared a thought on Political Politics and Developmental Politics. As you are all aware, in politics there are two dimensions, the first one is political politics and the other is developmental politics. Political politics was essential during the time of independence movement. Today, what is needed for India? With its 340 million people living below poverty line and the illiteracy rate is in the order of 30%, the employment seekers of more than 30 million, our mission is to lift the millions of people who are below poverty line and to provide graceful and empowered life with full employment potential. That indeed necessitates the developmental politics.

I would like to visualize a situation in which the political parties in our country competing with each other in putting forth their political vision through their manifesto. The voters have a right to question the manifesto and give suggestion for improving the manifesto based on local and regional needs.

When the opportunity is given for a particular party by the people in the election process to implement the development plan and it becomes a reality with the support of all members, the country and the people will be blessed by the noble act of the Parliamentarians. Democracy provides opportunity for everybody to prove oneself how better you can perform in realizing the vision of the nation.

The need for removal of poverty totally out of our country, the need for providing opportunities for all our people in the fiercely competitive and knowledge based world and the need for providing security to the people and nation in the complex world of today, these

multiple needs ? leads to the necessity of our political system graduating from political politics to Development Politics. In a sense, it is a "post-graduation" for the whole nation and therefore the Parliament and state Legislatures which has an exalted position to give directions to the nation. The discussions, debate, consensus towards these kind of goals based on the opportunity given through the Parliamentary democracy, will certainly lead India towards the path of reaching a developed India even before 2020. This is called developmental politics.

The election commission must carry out research on the success of development politics in different parts of the nation and present their findings to the both house of parliament and the people of the nation. In this connection, I would like put forth my experience in Amravati where I addressed a student gathering of over 100,000. At the end of the meet, I asked how many would like to join politics. Very few raised their hands. When I asked one of them what he will do when he joins politics. He said, "I will remove corruption!" Another student told, that he will work for developing his constituency and find employment for every citizen. Among the people who did not raise their hands, I asked one of them why he did not want to join politics - he said, "I do not know what my future will be if I join politics!" Yet another youth said, "I will have to have large wealth if I have to join politics". These responses represent the national scenario of politics and politicians.

There is a need to remove the correlation between wealth and politics, uncertainty in the political system and youth must see clean politics as a viable career for serving people. I am sure, election commission can play an important role in bringing this message to action.

### **Importance of exercising the franchise**

It is important for every Indian voter to vote and exercise his or her franchise. The enlightened voter can suggest to the parties to include constituency development plans as a part of the overall macro manifesto of the party with time bound targets which will empower the local voters to make their own individual judgments based on the developmental needs and deliverables of their regions? Can the voters who have been given the valuable EPICs today demand such information from the competing candidates in their constituencies? If you start doing it, I am sure, nation will have great leaders who will have no other work other than removing the pain of the people and uplifting their socio-economic conditions.

### **Overcoming the cancer of corruption**

On 21st November 2005, I had visited Adhichunchanagiri Math, attended a function of FUREC (Foundation for Unity of Religions and Enlightened Citizenship) and interacted with over 54,000 students of various schools and colleges of Karnataka. There a 10th class student Ms. M. Bhavani studying in Adichunchanagiri Composite High School, Sharavathy Nagar, Shimoga asked me the following question.

"Dear Sir, What is the role of students to stop corruption which is deeply rooted in our county just like cancer?"

Agony of the young mind is reflected in this question. For me it was an important question, since it came from a young mind. I was thinking what type of solutions we could give. My thought process was the following:

I said there are one billion people in the country and nearly 200 million homes. In general there are good citizens everywhere. However, if we find that people in few million houses are not transparent and not amenable to the laws of the country, what can we do? These houses apart from parents have one daughter or one son or both. If the parents in these houses are deviating from the transparent path the children can use the tool of love and affection and correct the parents to come back to the right path. I asked all the children assembled in that gathering, in case parents of few children get deviated from transparency, will you children boldly tell your parents, father or mother, you are not doing the right thing, that is what we are taught by you and in the school. Most of the children spontaneously responded, "We will do it". The confidence comes from them that they have love as a tool. Similarly I have also asked the parents in some other meeting, initially there was a silence, later, many of them hesitantly agreed that they would abide by the children's suggestion since it is driven by love. They took an oath from me. The oath was **"I will lead an honest life free from all corruption and will set an example for others to adopt a transparent way of life"**. Finally I told the students that they should start a movement starting from their home. Youth of today have to fight to eradicate corruption by making each home righteous.

### The "What Can I Give Mission?"

Friends, let me now discuss about a very important area which is significant to our quest in evolving an economically developed nation by 2020. Of course, we are making significant progress in all directions which is propelling India at a growth rate in excess of 9%. But we also have many challenges to overcome. They include, corruption and moral turpitude in the nation, environmental degradation and the need to build a compassionate society. These are evils which need to be defeated by the goodness of the youth. Where do such evils arise from? It arises from the never ending greed of what can I take? The fight for corruption free, ethical society, good environment hence will have to be fought against this greed and replace "What can I take?" to the spirit of "What Can I Give"? And if we inculcate the spirit of What Can I Give, it would not only be our strength in overcoming moral degradation, but also ensure a society which is compassionate, environmentally conscious and caring towards each other. As citizens, we need to ask ourselves one question - What Can I Give? Let me give some examples:

1. Can I be an Environment Giver, thereby giving a clean environment and conserve the planet and its habitat from degradation? (billion trees for billion people; today we can decide, each one of us will plant five trees and nurture)
2. Can I be a Care giver, and providing care to those needy, those who are sick and those who are lonely in their pains? (Visit a hospital and give happiness to the patients who are not visited by anybody. You can offer flowers, fruits and cheerfulness of the youth)
3. Can I be a Good Democracy Giver? (Will I ensure that in every elections, I vote responsibly, my family votes responsibly and my neighborhood votes responsibly? Can I ensure that my vote goes for those who work with integrity and succeed with integrity?)

Friends, let me now put-forth a unique mission which has being launched across the nation in which I would like every member present here to be a part of. It is a called "THE WHAT CAN I GIVE" movement. What can I give is the mission to generate great youth with ethics and great families with value system. You can write to me with your ideas or visit [www.whatcanigive.info](http://www.whatcanigive.info) and make it a vibrant mechanism of connecting people with a common goal of "Giving".

## Conclusion

Friends, conscience is the light of the Soul that burns within the chambers of our psychological heart. It is as real as life is. It raises the voice in protest whenever anything is thought of or done contrary to the righteousness. Conscience is a form of truth that has been transferred through our genetic stock in the form of the knowledge of our own acts and feelings as right or wrong. On the National Voters' Day, let us all take a pledge to effectively use our hard-earned franchise and use our conscience to vote for the ideal candidate who can ensure growth, prosperity and peace of our nation. When you keep conscience clear, righteousness will prevail upon you.

### Righteousness

Where there is righteousness in the heart,  
There is beauty in the character.  
When there is beauty in the character,  
There is harmony in the home.  
When there is harmony in the home,  
There is an order in the nation.  
When there is order in the nation,  
There is peace in the world.

For achieving a good governance and great society, the starting point is righteousness in the heart. I am sure, the important aspect of righteousness, honesty, selflessness, unbiased attitude and integrity are embedded in each one of our voters who have received EPICs today. If all the voters of our country decide righteously, I am confident India can be proud to be a great country with great leaders.

Once again let me greet all the participants on this occasion of National Voters' Day. My best wishes to all the citizens of my country for success in their mission of making the country great through great leaders by their considered utilization of franchise.

May God Bless you all.

**By, Dr. APJ Abdulkalam**