

In pursuit of immortality

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I am now planning having a grand ceremony at my residence, the next time I purchase a Television, Music System, Refrigerator or any costly household appliance. The ceremony will be replete with a plaque mentioning of-course my name in bold, which will be stuck to the equipment. After all being the boss of the house I shall be doing the honors almost every time. At times I may also invite senior neighbors for the ceremony and their names will also be displayed on the plaque in an appropriate capacity, maybe of guests of honor.

Sounds strange, to the extent of being ridiculous, but also sounds very familiar!

Jokes apart, my wife and daughters, all of them with stern faces have warned me that my plan is outright foolish and they would go to any extent to prevent me from putting it in action. They are certain that my scheme is going to make me not “amar”, but a laughing stock amongst friends. They reasoned that if engraving names on foundation/inaugural plaques started conferring “amaratva”, on the person so named, then perhaps I would have been permitted to indulge, but not otherwise. My elder daughter also sarcastically reminded me that Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru are “amar” not because of their names having been engraved on plaques, but because of their contribution to the society and the nation they lived in.

My last visit to Simla shocked me. Worthy attempts at glorifying heritage structures by placing granite plaques highlighting their significance, had fallen terribly short of the professed objective because the plaques mainly glorified the officials responsible not for building the structure, but for putting the plaque in place. I visualize a scenario 100 years hence when it would appear that the names on the plaques are those of the builders. History would then stand rewritten and someone who was born 50 years after the structure was built would stand glorified as the builder of the structure. Almost everything, with perhaps the exception of taps, commodes and washbasins seems to get inaugurated these days and the plaque mentions the name of the great man dedicating the inconsequential achievement to the nation in the august presence of dignitaries. It is however of little significance that the item inaugurated shows visible signs of decay shortly thereafter. I then wonder what sort of immortality were these gentlemen seeking.

There have also been many other occasions when inconsequential things have been inaugurated. But one occasion that was really the cause of great entertainment for the participants was the inauguration of a public toilet block and a new kind of dustbin. But sarkari people are becoming smarter by the day and I am sure that the future generations shall not leave even a tap, commode, washbasin or a flushing cistern un-inaugurated. The only problem may be how does one lay a foundation stone for such items, but our brainy youngsters, well groomed in the art of sycophancy shall find a way out of this impasse.

We have become a society of ceremonies! Open any newspaper and you find innumerable instances of the same. Advertisements announcing inaugural or foundation stone ceremonies have become common. The ceremony itself becomes larger than life and the very cause of the ceremony becomes insignificant. Omnipresent sycophants also contribute in no small measure by leaving no stone unturned during such occasions and well after the event is over, the basic cause is quite often forgotten. Sometimes it even so happens that first it is decided to have a ceremony and then the cause is suitably evolved. Well on a sober note, comparing the two, I am more for the inaugurals because they signify completion of an activity even if it is a toilet block or the plaque itself. However what really irritates, are the foundation stones, which are a dime a dozen these days and no one really has even the foggiest idea of the day when the act itself would get consummated. You lay a foundation stone with great fanfare and then conveniently move on to another ceremony elsewhere. But think of the positive side. Every activity has so much potential for ceremonies and there are so many petty activities to be performed. Everybody who is somebody can therefore always remain busy either cutting ribbons or marking attendance during these ceremonies. The potential is immense and I am confident that we as a society are leaving no stone unturned in lapping it up ad infinitum.

I am however not able to appreciate this great fervor for laying stones for almost every activity under the sun. Is provision of basic infrastructure and other facilities not something very fundamental that should happen without making a fuss or trying to gain credit for the same. Why do we then lay foundation or inaugural stones for initiating routine obligatory functions? Or is it that the Indian society has become so bankrupt of achievements that even a minor addition is considered a glorious achievement worthy of celebration and whose builders should be immortalized in stone for posterity. I am however not deriding these stones totally. Definitely we should lay foundation and inaugural stones for major highways, new railway lines, power stations, big factories, metro systems or other such major achievement that would in course of time result in a major contribution to the society. These would definitely be achievements of stature and the builders or dreamers of them deserve being immortalized in history, but not those of toilet blocks, flyovers, inconsequential items or small structures, which being part of the daily life routine should have been there in the first place. Moreover seeking personal glory for doing things that form part of our duty is, I consider belittling human dignity. Traditional Indian modesty, which we have also lost touch with, is evident in the Vedas including Mahabharata which despite being treasure houses of wisdom do not even indicate the names of the writers.

We ape the west in almost every sphere of our life. I recently asked a westerner whether they also have such ceremonies as frequently as in India. He smirked and said that such ceremonies send a signal that the nation is bereft of real achievements. **It is sad but true**, a truth that dawns on me every day when I open the morning newspaper. Besides the routine and the sensational stuff, there are news stories about cultural events being held, CD's being released, exhibitions being inaugurated, petty structures being built and many other insignificant events trying to instill national pride. What is generally missing are significant achievements in any sphere of activity, achievements that would make all of us hold our heads high with pride. Does it mean that we have become a

nation of non-achievers, the conformists or the status quoist. **Again sad but true.** A very high acceptability of the status quoists by our society is what is hampering the real growth of the nation. **A society that feels uneasy of achievers is what we have become today.** A society whose constituents have, with passage of time started laying a great premium on **non-deliverence.** And therefore the foundation and inaugural stones, which give a false sense of achievement, derived from mediocre run of the mill accomplishments.

If ever I become someone whose writ runs large, I would place an immediate ban on laying of any type of stone other than the tombstone. Let people be known and remembered for what they have achieved in life or contributed to the society, rather than by having their names engraved in granite or marble stones.

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