

Lessons in Tehzeeb!

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Recently a very nice article about the *tehzeeb* (etiquette, politeness) of Shri. Atal Behari Vajpayee (ABV) the Former Prime Minister of India came in Indian Express. Apparently ABV was not happy with the pressure of U.S.A. on India to join the Iraq war. So he invited the opposition party leaders for a breakfast to his house. After initial chitchat the opposition leaders were keen to know why they were invited. ABV told them about the U.S. pressure on India, to which the leaders said that they will oppose it and the people's agitation was already on. ABV replied that he is not hearing the noise of agitation! Opposition leaders immediately understood the drift of the conversation that they have to double up their efforts to raise the public opinion against U.S. so that ABV could use it to stall the pressure.

Contrast this with the present dispensation where direct onslaught is launched on opposition to create fear. We somehow have lost the *tehzeeb* (good manners, cultured attitude and outlook) in the present political and other discourses.

[Shri. K. C. Pant](#) the former Defense Minister and a very dear friend of mine told me of another instance of such *tehzeeb*.

Dr. R. Radhakrishnan the first Vice-President (VP) of India did not want another term as VP. Instead he wanted to be elevated to the President's post. Jawaharlal Nehru the Prime Minister was keen on it and wanted Dr. Radhakrishnan to become President but others in the party wanted Shri Rajendra Prasad to continue and had their say. Naturally Dr. Radhakrishnan was unhappy and used to complain about it and threatened that he will return to his teaching career after his term gets over.

Nehru sent [Maulana Abul Kalam Azad](#) to placate Radhakrishnan. MAK Azad was a very cultured person and the doyen of Independence movement. MAK Azad engaged Dr. Radhakrishnan in small talk but Radhakrishnan was angry and knew the purpose

of Azad's visit. So he retorted that I am not interested in the second term and will go back to teaching. To which Azad asked politely "In which University?" Radhakrishnan got the message and agreed to remain as VP for second term.

A similar story about the wit and *tehzeeb* of [Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant](#) was told to me by [Sunder Lal](#) a former Member of Parliament (MP) of Congress Party. Sunder Lal was the youngest MP in 1952 and remained an MP till 1987 (the year he died).

I think the incident was in early 1950s when Uttar Pradesh (U.P.) was facing tremendous drought especially in eastern part from where [Raj Narain](#) came from. Raj Narain was quite a hooligan and believed in creating ruckus in assembly and was the first person to create a shouting brigade that we see today in Assemblies and Parliament. At that time he was an MLA and G. B. Pant was the Chief Minister of U.P.

In one of the debates he created a ruckus in the U.P. Assembly by shouting at the top of his voice and stating that in his constituency great famine is taking place and farmers are dying, whereas the C.M. is not at all concerned and is only interested in his gaddi and hobnobbing with industrialists.

G. B. Pant rose to answer Raj Narain and said that he has known Raj Narain for a long time; and as a socialist and follower of [Jai Prakash Narayan](#) and Ram Manohar Lohia he has great regard for him and his sincerity. Then he said politely but firmly "I also know that had the situation been really that grim, Raj Narain being a very committed worker would not be sitting here in assembly but tending to his poor farmers"! The assembly erupted in peels of laughter and Raj Narain sat down quietly.

Such wit and *tehzeeb* which was also the hallmark of Atal Behari Vajpayee is missing in the present parliamentary debates and scenarios.

I think one of the reasons of why we have lost the art of debate and discourse is that we have either reduced or stopped teaching children the debating skills in school. Unfortunately in present schooling systems when the pressures of passing exams are

paramount such debates and discourses are missing. I wish the youngsters should be taught, cajoled and inspired by great discourse and debate.

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