

Insecurity And Reason - The Torment Of An American Election

The recent epic, dramatic, and enigmatic American presidential elections were more than one party's victory over the other - they were painful excavations into the emotional personality of the majority of the people. They were the revelation of the deeper fault lines of the American psyche. The winning votes were not cast for the good results the incumbent candidate achieved in his past term or for the politically abler candidate of the two competing ones, but for the one who stoked more the fears of the supposed impending doom of the terrorism, for the one wearing the evangelical accouterment, for the one invisibly leading the armies of the political right. Never in the history of the modern presidency has so much reason been sacrificed for so much drummed up fear of the unknown and for the diaphanous vapors of faith; not so many facts ignored for the sovereignty of the emotion. Americans re-crowned a president hugely despised in the world and voted into power an administration that is not known for statesmanship and sensitivity to the issues. The people outside U.S. wonder why American people could have done so. This torment is the greater as most of the countries in the world look up to America as the paragon of success and the bastion of democracy and therefore attempt to emulate it. The Hamletian conflict between life and death hovers over the global psyche, engendered by the innocent U.S. presidential election of 2004, as something very vital and valuable seems to have been the casualty in it.

Bush won 51% to 48% - far from a landslide. Republicans also won in the Senate and in the House - a clean sweep that portends something very ominous and mysterious. By all stretches of imagination John Kerry was the abler of the two candidates, with a formidable record of military and legislative experience, further reinforced by a heavier intellectual apparatus. He also had a more detailed domestic agenda, focused more on the human and environmental concerns, developed in the last four decades, than Bush did. The mindless war in Iraq was such a huge burden on the reelection of Bush that it is astonishing and disturbing that in spite of it he was rewarded with four more years. Furthermore, in spite of Michael Moore's dramatic and revealing movie Fahrenheit 9/11, seen

by over a few million people (setting a record for a documentary movie), a cache of anti-Bush books, the revelation of intelligence snafus, administration's deliberate misinformation about Iraq war, and pathetic war planning, Bush won. His victory is the victory of fear and faith over reason.

Liberalism stands for intellectual liberty and the spiritual and ethical content of Christianity. Its political philosophy is based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of human race, and the autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties; its economic philosophy emphasizes individual freedom from restraint and is usually based on free competition, the self-regulating market, and the gold standard. The ideas of democracy, rights of the individual, the freedom to think and believe are its gifts in the long and the arduous struggle of humankind to become civilized. But today liberalism is a much reviled word, the epithet for the unrealistic, fantastical, and doomed political course in American politics. This election seems to have securely nailed down the coffin of the political liberalism for a decade to come. So much misunderstanding and so much emotionalism has not been displayed for a long time in American politics.

The results of the presidential election should not come as a surprise to the experts as well as to the lay people, as it has been in making for a while. Right on from Reagan's election in 1980, the electorate has been precipitously veering to the right. It is not a matter of Democratic party's wrong messages or lack of effective strategy to win or lack of ambition to prevail. It is something deeper than that. U.S. is the center of the world capitalism. But this material capacity, with the consequential philosophy, coupled with the enormous political freedom U.S. has developed, has not translated into happiness for a lot of people in the present era. Many Americans are intensely and obsessively searching for some tangible base of happiness. Happiness on a large scale is a complex chemistry of experience, culture, religion, politics, economics, and history. While Americans have the last five elements in the complex compound of happiness, the first and the second one, the experience and the culture, are not holding well. Looking at the phenomena of mass killings, alienation, loneliness, high rate of divorce, substance dependence, etc., it is clear that the general unhappiness among large

number of Americans is a force to reckon with. When a people have been twisted and torn in a state of unhappiness for a long time, their culture starts to transform - a natural reaction of the human survival instinct.

Looking into the past for relief of the present calamity is a well established instinct to overcome it. In our generation we know how Islamic people have wanted to replace some of their criminal and civil laws with the ancient Islamic laws and in general go back to the ways of the past. Many Americans, in their own ways, want to go to the morals and the ways of their ancient culture. This leap into the past is the vision for peace and happiness of many thoughtful and sensitive people. But this cultural regression does not make sense in light of civilization's development in many areas.

The people who voted for Bush did not think that U.S. has created a catastrophe in Iraq and therefore there was no reason to their denying its creator another four years. They, in their ways, were looking at a larger picture, in which morality and values hold a higher place in human affairs than the distraction of Iraq. In their frame of mind they wanted to give Bush the benefit of doubt, as they did not understand or did not want to understand, the intricacies of Iraq war. The great messenger of goodness has to be spared of the treacherous vortexes of the world problems, to enable him to help humanity in the larger issues of life and the world. In the same angle of thought, Bush backers did not think much of the U.S. foreign policy estrangement due to Iraq affair with the long established, and indispensable, European allies. They did not give much importance to the aggravation caused to the Islamic alienation by the war, thereby encouraging the terrorism. They did not think much of the difficult economic times they are plodding through. They do not care for the intellectual stature of the man in the White House. Bush's loss in the three presidential debates did not cost him much in the elections. About seven out of ten people voting for Bush thought that Iraq had something to do with the events of 9/11. They voted for a great redeemer in the White House, an unworldly spirit, in spite of his negative and low-level campaign. They have voted for their twin fears of spiritual and physical lives. This is the unabashed triumph of insecurity over reason.

While people have a right to vote the way they want to, but the quality of their vote matters to the nation. The fall out of this election is that all the standard ways of judging elections were not applicable to it, because a huge number of voters voted out their fears and evangelical feelings and not their political, economic, and security concerns. It was well established in the election that Kerry has the capacity to become the president, including the capacity to fight the terrorism, but the people did not so much vote against him, as they voted for Bush. And they did not vote for Bush for what he is, but for his extra-worldly affiliation..

2004 U.S. presidential election augers badly for the world democracies. The potency of the faith based perspectives among its people unveils a dark corner of the human psyche, which in the process of thousands of years of human civilization seemed to have slowly but surely decreased. How can large segments of people turn a blind eye to the enactment of a war against an unthreatening sovereign nation, killing thousands of people, angering a billion Muslim people, and squandering billions of dollars? How can a country reward poor political and economic performance of an administration? Democracies are as good as the people they control. When a state of mind afflicts a large segment of people, the democracy controlling it is paralyzed; the forward march of humankind stumbles.