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The hopes and doubts

Sir,

Lt Gen SK Sinha deserves kudos for his thought provoking article "The hopes and doubts" (IE March 17). The thought that Rahul Gandhi, Varun Gandhi or perhaps some Tutu Gandhi might one day rule this country on the basis of dynastic succession is indeed frightening and should stir the people to own responsibilities enjoined upon them by the democratic set up. The General, however, seems to give an impression that the worst elements of society joining politics and men of ability and integrity keeping away from it, is a phenomenon peculiar to our country. This is in fact the bane of democracy and while we may be a little worse off than others in this regard, no other democratic state can claim that its Parliament consists entirely of its brain and virtue.

There are two reasons for this. One: honest politics is not paying in terms of money and only those who have other sources of income may indulge in it. Most honest people with primary concern for earning a livelihood cannot, therefore, afford either the time or the energy required for political activity. This leaves the field free for the unscrupulous who thrive on ill-gotten gains for which there is ample scope in politics.

The second reason is that politics is after all a dirty game difficult for an honest man to play. In the system of elections under universal suffrage only he who can appeal to the lowest intelligence can win. This gives him an opportunity to obscure real but inconvenient issues under slogans and catchwords or some irrelevancies, which are likely to touch the voters' emotions and prejudices rather than logic and reason that may have otherwise exposed him. In fact, hypocrisy, dishonesty (moral) and deviousness are acknowledged attributes of a successful politician. What the election can make the politician do may be seen from the fact that even a man like VP Singh had to acquire the services of rank communalists (in preference to known nationalists) for securing Muslim votes from Allahabad.

All this is not to say that "good people" who for some reason or the other cannot join politics have no role to play in a democracy. They have the all too important role of the watchdog of democracy to play. In a situation like ours, where the voter is weak and the professional politician strong, there is a constant danger to democracy. The good and the selfless must help in creating the right type of public opinion, which could act as a dyke against the activities of the dirty politician – harmful to democracy and the nation.

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