Rajniti vs. Lokoniti vs. Jananiti

CHINTITO

RAJNITI, as the Bangla word for politics, is clearly a misnomer and could be the root cause of all our *misty* troubles. Now '*misty*' to you could by all means mean sweet, but it is quite the contrary in the present context. And the seventy-Taka-kg bitter sugar has nothing to do with it. Someone may even pronounce that the price escalation is the latest move by the government to control diabetes.

See our plight begins here. If you read that as 'flight', we will know you hail from that not-so-*khali* district, where 'paw' is 'faw' and vice versa, but such lingua franca could indicate you are in a copse of confusion. Surely that has little to do with France; in fact, it is late 17th century Italian. We could go on and on about words conveying the wrong meaning, and that brings us back to our topic. Although in Bangladesh we are not supposed to be under any *raj*; we were once upon a time, and we seem to be trying to maintain some *niti*. So there is bound to be chaos, as was evident from Satyajit's *Heerak Rajar Deshey*.

Politics has everything to do with electing and running a government, about acquiring legislative and executive powers for some people set up by methods as diverse as fair elections, unfair elections, rebellions, royal decrees, hierarchy and military coups. It may not always be able to provide power because there may be a shortfall of thousands of megawatts, but it is the theory and practice of government.

So, should not the Bangla word for politics have been *sarkari niti*? It may have conveyed the reality on the ground but it would have been an unpopular non-starter with democracy being our national yearning, ever since we took the cue from Mahatma Gandhi and decided to drive the British Raj away. We should have done away with *rajniti* then.

History for one thing is against us, because from the earliest days politics was the order of the *rajah*. The Babylonian king Hammurabi ruled from 1792 to 1750 BC. His Code of Hammurabi, as it is known, describes the laws for stable government and good rule. It is the oldest surviving code for governance and, inscribed on a pillar of black basalt, it could also be the precursor of the black laws that followed man to the day.

Although politics began as *rajniti*, the time has come to change it because now the people, even if supposedly so, decide everything. You can take your time off to have a good laugh.

With our national elections approaching and parties already drumming up support, a party manifesto could declare that if voted to power they shall do away with *rajniti*. Before any of their adversaries conclude they are giving up politics, they shall add that they are instead going to introduce *lokoniti* the policy of the people. Just to be different, as is always the case, the other party could declare that they too will do away with *rajniti* and introduce *jananiti*. Then some overenthusiastic supporters of the two parties could start fighting on yet another meaningless matter to argue which is better--*lokoniti* or *jananiti*. As usual *rajniti* would have the last laugh.

With politics come politicians. Said the late Algerian-born French novelist Albert Camus in Notebooks: 'Politics and the fate of mankind are shaped by men without ideas and without greatness. Men who have greatness within them don't go in for politics'. That may make some of us feel great, but we are not being able to do a great deal.

It is not politics but some of the politicians, many in it for personal gain, much of it financial, who have ruined a system that was designed for apparently the welfare of the people. But a politician somebody active in politics is most often used in a derogatory sense in Bangladesh. We are not alone. 'Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even where there's no river', said Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader while talking to some American journalists.

Now whether *rajniti* will actually become some other people-oriented *niti*, despite the election pledge, is another matter. Politicians are famous for making promises and pledges, especially before an election. And that accusation stretches beyond our boundary. 'I thought he (Winston Churchill) was a young man of promise; but it appears he was a young man of promises,' commented Arthur Balfour the British prime minister in 1899 when the future British prime minister joined politics.

And if you thought we were the only ones upset with our politicians then hear US poet and painter E.E. Cummings, who said, 'a politician is an arse upon which everyone has sat except a man'.

In conclusion let us quote British philosopher and mathematician Bertrand Russell: 'Our great democracies still tend to think that a stupid man is more likely to be honest than a clever man, and our politicians take advantage of this prejudice by pretending to be even more stupid than nature has made them.'

Let us promote *lokoniti* and *jananiti*. For politics as *rajniti* stinks of crowned heads, monarchs, sovereigns, royal family ... of leadership by family lineage.

Surely a doctor's child is not a doctor by birth. ■