



Love comforteth like sunshine after rain.

William Shakespeare

NO BED OF ROSES

S. BURMALLA



Don't like your neighbourhood park? Blame bad governance.

I know every inch of my neighbourhood park, because I have been walking in it for nearly two decades. Rarely have I missed my morning round and when possible, I take one in the evening too. In fact, my walk is integral to my living.

For me, the goings on in the park are interesting indicators of our methods of governance and our social developments. Let me tell you how. Besides ancient minarets and green spaces, the garden has a wonderful layout of 26 fountains spread over a 200 metre stretch and positioned in a straight line. These are found on three levels, similar to Mughal times. The fountains are fed by a huge open water tank at one end of the garden. At the other end, is a creatively done circular 'sprouter' fixed on a pedestal with smaller similar ones surrounding it.

There is also provision of a pond to feed a waterfall which could flow along the stone resting wall of the main feeder tank.

So, in all, we're talking about a five-tier waterscape. A pond, a waterfall, a tank, the fountains and a huge circular sprouter.

"Truly, a poem without words!" But when does the water fall? Or the fountains play? Or the sprouts spray water?

These are questions that need to be answered. To the best of my memory, I have seen such sights only three times in the 20 years I have taken walks in the park. But I have seen repair work going on in different parts of the waterscape every year.

For what? I wonder. And for whom? Even today one of the ponds is full of debris. I wonder how much money has been wasted on plastering thin layers of cement and carrying out hypocritical renovations of different disjointed systems each year?

Amusingly, the main tank retains enough water to breed mosquitoes until a media photographer threatens to shoot pictures. The tank remains dry for a few days and then it's back to square one again. So much for the tank. Forget about fountains or sprouts. I wonder if they work at all? Gosh! What does all this amount to?

I write because I am distressed by the state of affairs particularly during sum-

mers when one walks around watching dry fountains — symbols of neglect — craving to come alive. Imagine if the fountains worked. It would be heavenly. Children would have flocked to the garden and not always insisted on going to the crowded India Gate.

Why does this happen? This is because our performance evaluation systems are not based on ground realities. The work is not assessed by public perceptions. Only manipulated reports are submitted in controlled narrow precincts. Senior officials are not ready to let go their cozy chairs and air conditioned and closed-door offices to review the ground scenario for themselves. They are also not walkers in the sense that they do not 'walk their work'. The day the supervisors come to see things for themselves, incognito, the actual impact of the work claimed to be done or paid for by their juniors or the department will stand exposed.

The point is, we need to devise more accountable systems of performance. Or else, we will keep 'voting out' on anti-incumbency and 'voting in' because we do not have a provision for a 'no-vote'. Merely seeking information will also not help. It has not scared the non-performers into action. We need to hold them responsible (financially perhaps) for non-performance.

Is the current Pay Commission listening?

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