

16-08-2005 - Statutory resolution regarding disapproval of the Citizenship (Amendment) Ordinance, 2005 and Citizenship (Amendment ) Bill, 2005.

Sir, this Bill actually is to fulfil the Declaration made by our Prime Minister that instead of giving citizenship to Indians living abroad in 16 countries, - he promised - Overseas Citizenship of India will be made available to people of Indian origin in all countries except Pakistan and Bangladesh. This was a very correct decision. If you look at it, there is a background. You may remember that in Indian freedom struggle, Sikhs living in Canada played a very historic role in the formation of Gadar Party; in the sending of Kamagata Maru. All these are part of our history. Not only we in India fought for our freedom but Indians who lived abroad – I am just advancing to Indians who lived in England, France, Mexico, Japan, Germany, Canada and South Africa – also fought like us for Independence. In a way, we can say that Mahatma Gandhi was a citizen of India who lived abroad for the best part of his life. I can remember people like Shri M.N. Roy, Madam Cama, and even for that matter Shri V.K. Krishana Menon; he did his fight for Independence not in Kerala or in India but in London. So, in the freedom struggle, they had contributed much.

Sir, if we recognise that, that has a great meaning. Some people mentioned China in a different context. I must say that the Chinese are treating the Overseas Chinese in a very respectful and careful manner. Everybody admits that China gets an immense financial support from Overseas Chinese. We are also getting it, and we can also do that. We can make use of it in a big way. We are giving recognition to those Indians who are living abroad that we are prepared to treat them as Indian citizens. So, I support the Bill from that angle.

I think, there is need for a change in the Representation of People Act also to meet another situation. The hon. Minister of Home Affairs might know that from Kerala millions of people are living abroad, especially in the Gulf countries and their contribution is so big that it has been admitted that our foreign exchange difficulties are in a way met by these people who are working abroad through their contribution to our exchequer. So, considering that, are we giving them any benefit for that?

The Keralites who are living in the Gulf countries have a very simple demand. There was a meeting recently in Tiruvananthapuram of representatives of all people from various Gulf countries, with the support of the Government of Kerala. They wanted that they should be given opportunity to vote. They are not citizens of other countries. They are Indian citizens. They had gone in search of jobs and are living abroad. They are regularly visiting our country and contributing greatly to our economy. So, their demand is that first of all their names should be included in the voters' list. According to the Representation of People Act, there is a lacuna. Only those who ordinarily live in India could be included in the voters' list. They are not ordinarily living in India. They are ordinarily living outside India but greatly contributing to India. So, an amendment should be brought in such a way that these people who are contributing much to the economy and the society as a whole but working abroad and retaining their Indian citizenship should be provided opportunity to be in the voters' list and to vote when they are here at the time of elections. I think, it is very necessary that we should make that amendment keeping such a consideration in mind. I look at this Bill as a step forward and hope that the hon. Minister would consider this proposal regarding the amendment of the Representation of People Act.

There are people largely from Kerala working in the Gulf countries. The Indian Embassy has very little arrangement to take care of their needs. Some of our people from Saudi Arabia have written to me stating that there is going to be an Indian Festival but the Indian Embassy is not giving due consideration to the Malayali population there. Theirs is the biggest Indian population there but they are not part of the Indian festival. It is a very strange discrimination done by the bureaucracy which goes against the interests of the country.

As you know, there are many Indians languishing in the jails of Pakistan. Recently, I got a complaint from Kerala. Kerala is quite far away from Pakistan but fishermen who go to fish do not know the international water borders and in the course of fishing they might have violated the borders. They have been put behind the bar but there is no serious attempt made by the Embassy or Government of India to help them so that they could come back. So, I request that the Government should take serious interest in dealing with this problem at the diplomatic level. Recently, when the Communist leaders visited Pakistan and met the Pakistan President, they took up this issue and he said he would sympathetically consider this matter but he also said that this should be taken up by the Government. So, the Government of India should take up seriously this problem of Indians languishing in jails in Pakistan so that they could be brought back as soon as possible.

With these words and with the hope that the Government would respond to these points, I support this Bill.