

FREEDOM AND DISCIPLINE

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

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Freedom and discipline are two distinct yet inter-related concepts. Freedom is a natural and universal yearning of man. Physical body, mind and soul which together make a living human being have their own functions and needs. Man acts through the physical body which is guided by mind. Body is destructible. Its time span is limited. Its continuity with the past is maintained by the soul which is eternal and indestructible. Freedom is broadly categorized as economic freedom and freedom of thought and expression as well as belief which is also described as intellectual and religious freedom.

Being a social animal, man has to live in society. His freedom therefore cannot be absolute. It has to be compatible with the freedom of his other fellow beings in society. If it is left unchecked and unregulated, it leads to law of the jungle, to anarchy. Therefore freedom has to be disciplined and regulated. Therefore along with freedom man needs a code of conduct, a value system to ensure and sustain an orderly life in society. Vedic seers conceived and conceptualized such a code of conduct. They called it **Dharma** which was pronounced as Dhamma by Lord Buddha.

According to Indian and Hindu tradition, man was born free and lived in a society in which there was no ruler and no ruled. All were equal and their lives and conduct towards one another were guided by Dharma. This code is applicable to the entire mankind irrespective of race, creed and country.

But in course of time the strong began to ignore Dharma. They oppressed and exploited the weak. That created a need for an authority to enforce Dharma, regulate their freedom to bring order and fair-play in society. Such authority was “Raja”, the Sanskrit word for the ruler or king. It means, “one who endeavors to please all by disposing justice and enforce discipline without fear or favour. His duty is to enforce Dharma”. Rule or governance in accordance with Dharma came to be described as “Dharma Raj” or rule of law. The Raja, to begin with was elected by the people and his oath of office made it obligatory for him to enforce Dharma, the law and rules of conduct impartially.

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With the passage of time as kingdoms expanded in area and resources, the rulers became more powerful. They began to ignore Dharma and became despotic and oppressive. Similar developments took place in all parts of the world. Some kingdoms became empires through conquest of the weaker states and acquisition of new territories and subjects. The growth of slave system and serfdom which negate freedom and curtail liberty took place side by side.

With the rise of exclusive religions and formation of theocratic state, things became worse. Rulers of such theocratic states not only suppressed civil liberties of the people but also denied them freedom of belief and worship. They had to conform to the religion of the ruler.

As oppression and suppression of civil, political and religious freedom of the people began to cross all limits, movements against such oppressive regimes and for regaining basic liberties began to rise in different countries. Movements such as renaissance in Europe and Bhakti Movement in India gave moral and intellectual support to such organized expressions for freedom.

However, in the political field, despotic monarchical system continued to prevail. Concentration of political power and religious power in the same hand in a theocratic state made the situation worse. Therefore, movement for reformation in the religious field and broadening of the power structure in the political field began side by side but took their own course in different countries. Reforms in the religious field led to acceptance of secularism which demands non-religious, uniform laws for all citizens and equality of all citizens before law.

Reforms in the political field led to the rise of parliamentary democracy based on the principle of participation of the people both in government as well as governance. Democracy and democratic form of government had existed in part of India and Greece long before the beginning of the Christian era. But their ancient republics were eaten up by the rising tide of imperialism reflected by the Mauryan empire in India and Roman empire in Europe.

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The modern form of parliamentary democracy, which is now the dominant and most popular form of government all over the world, had its origin in Britain. This form of government is sustained by freedom of thought, freedom of expression and freedom to elect a government of peoples' choice through free and fair elections. There can be no freedom of thought without freedom of action in the economic field i.e. the freedom to earn one's living.

This system of government, therefore, gave a new fillip to a competitive economic system called market economy. This led to the rise of a new class of the neo rich. This process was accelerated by the Industrial Revolution in the 17th and 18th century. Unrestricted economic freedom and unregulated market economy led to the rise of capitalism and exploitation of the weaker sections by the class of people which came to have lion's share in the control of capital.

The ills of capitalism and unregulated capitalist economy created reactions in some sensitive minds like Marx and Engels who propounded the concept of socialism to counter capitalism. Some rulers in states like the UK and Prussia took the Marxian writings seriously and undertook necessary corrective measures to reform their economic policies and improve the lot of the weaker sections by adopting liberal labor laws and social security measures. Therefore the socialist movement failed to bring about economic and political changes as envisaged by the founding fathers of socialist thought. But it found more receptive atmosphere in tsarist Russia. The situation created by the wide spread economic discontent was made worse by the defeat of Russian army in the first world war and the Russian Socialist Party in Russia which later came to be known as Communist Party took advantage of the situation. It engineered a coup with the help of the disaffected army personnel and brought about the Russian Revolution in Oct 1917 which put the Communist Party in power. It then declared Russia to be a communist state committed to socialism.

After the end of the second world war the world got divided into the democratic camp led by the USA which called itself the 'free world' and the communist camp led by Russia led Soviet Union. That marked the beginning of Cold war between the two camps. The nuclear deterrents in the hands of both the camps prevented cold war from hotting up world wide.

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However, localized conflict between the two camps and two ideologies became order of the day. Both sides began to mobilize people and extend their influence on ideological lines.

The technological revolution which turned the world into a 'Global village' by cutting down distances and braking the iron and bamboo curtains set up by the communist countries to keep their people under control enabled the people of the communist camp to compare their economic condition with the economic condition of the people of the free world. Consequently, a ferment began in their minds.

Failure of the Soviet armies in Afghanistan broke the myth of Soviet impregnability. This encouraged the people of Russia to stage a counter revolution against communism. That marked the beginning of the end of communism and communist empire. Disintegration of Soviet Union in the nineties and establishment of a liberal democratic government in Moscow followed.

This was hailed as a victory of freedom and democratic values and way of life and failure of the authoritarian communist system.

In the ultimate analysis, this was made possible by the superiority of the humanistic and democratic thought over the authoritarian system sustained by total control through regimentation of thought and suppression of freedom through control over economic life in the name of radical humanism. But man does not live by bread alone. He needs food for mind and soul as also moral values which distinguish a man from a beast. The liberal and humanistic thought in this regard is reflected in the four-fold aspirations of man presented in the Vedic lore as 'Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha'. Besides fulfillment of economic needs i.e. Artha, man also needs Kama i.e. fulfillment of sensual and other needs and desires. Their reckless and unregulated pursuit can prove dangerous and disastrous for individual as well as society. Their pursuit must be guided by Dharma, the moral values and a code of conduct conducive to all round and integrated progress. This projected as 'Integral Humanism' triumphed over radical humanism of the communist ideologues.

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Fulfillment of economic, socio-cultural and other material needs and wants is not the end all and be all of life. The ultimate yearning of man pertains to soul or the spirit which is called “Moksha” or salvation. Mahatma Buddha, the great philosopher and founder of Buddhism, was conscious of it. According to him, so long as one is alive, one cannot get rid of wants and desires completely. Non-fulfillment of desires causes pain, the ultimate release from pain can come from only when desires end that is possible only when one gets rid of the circle of birth and death by achieving Moksha. That ultimate yearning of the soul can be fulfilled by following the noble eight-fold path, good and meritorious life. This metaphysical thought and idealist view of life is beyond comprehension and practical life of the common man.

The common man wants happiness, fulfillment of his wants and desires and freedom.

Freedom comes first but it cannot be taken for granted. It requires eternal vigilance and preparedness to exercise it with due regard for the freedom and rights of his other fellow beings. Human beings, the mankind, cannot be divided into separate compartments, separate groups of friends and enemies. Acceptance of the unity of mankind; the principle of coexistence in peace and without fear and claim to equal treatment and equitable opportunity for education and healthcare and other basic needs and above all, freedom of thought and belief without depriving other fellow beings of these freedoms, is the essence of freedom.

Yet, despite loud talk and claims about freedom with necessary curbs and regulations, the prevailing situation in the world, in developing as well as developed countries is not very happy. New challenges to freedom, humanism and peaceful co-existence and threats to peace have come to the fore. Islamism and its methodology of terror is fast taking the place of communism and communist methodology of coercion. There is much in common between them. In a way, Islamism is worse because unlike Marxism, as propounded by Marx in Das Capital, there is no place for reason, discussion and dissent in the basic documents and norms of Islamism elaborated by Brigadier Malik of the Pakistan army in his book, “The Koranic Concept of War”. Concepts of ‘Millat’ and ‘Kufr’ which divide mankind between those who put faith in Mohammad and Koran and ...6/-

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and those who do not; 'Dar-ul-Islam' and 'Dar-ul-Harab' which divide the world into countries which are ruled by votaries of Islamism and those which are not ruled by them and 'Jihad' the continuous war against the 'kafirs' and the 'Dar-ul-Harab' countries that they are expected to carry as a religious duty and the very picture of 'Jannat' which those laying down their lives in jihad are promised sustain the Islamic terror which is now fast engulfing the whole world and dividing it in two warring camps.

Concerted efforts to humanize Islam and to make the world free of scourge of terrorism are needed to make the world safe for freedom and prevent the repetition of destruction of world heritage statues of Buddha at Bamiyan in Afghanistan, air-strikes on World Trade towers of New York and Parliament of India in New Delhi and more recently, the targeting of two synagogues and the British Consulate in Istanbul.

Need for correlating freedom with discipline demands a world-wide campaign to give a new orientation to educational programmes with greater stress on discipline and necessary curbs of freedom to make it compatible with 'freedom for all' and not for a privileged class only.

Rise of one domineering super power and majoritarianism in democratic countries in which numbers outweigh the quality and wisdom, globalised free economy in which multinational corporations and industries of developed countries are eating up small industries, driving out small farmers from their fields have also begun to vitiate atmosphere and deform the concept and sweep of freedom.

Therefore, those working for creating world consensus in favour of freedom and peace through unification of thought must keep in mind these new threats to freedom while discussing the problems relating to freedom and discipline.