

Human Rights, World Peace and Freedom

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The proposition 'Why should some human beings have more basic rights than others?' has led on to the global concepts of human rights and world peace linked to the fulfillment of basic human needs, security and above all, to the eradication of poverty. Many political leaders in different countries have acknowledged the importance of security in maintaining the equilibrium between world peace and human rights and have developed a conception of security. Security studies which often tends to ignore the normative questions linked to the control, threat and use of organized violence rests on a shallow foundation and, thus, stands isolated from its central question of its legitimization. An example that deserves to be cited in this context is of the trend to wed the normative enquiries to strategic studies and is the revived interest in the proposition that democracies do not wage war against one another, but promote human rights better than alternative regimes. They can lead simultaneously to an enhancement of human rights and peacefulness of the world. World peace sustains itself on enjoyment of human rights and freedom. We are certainly entitled to certain rights. No one gives or denies them to us. I have the right to inhale air; no one has given me this right and can deny me this right. As I was born into this world that belongs to nobody, I have the right to live peacefully and I can live peacefully so long as I shall refrain from infringing upon my neighbours' rights. But

right should not be construed as demand. As distinct from a demand, a right is justified and legitimate. A right is a claim against some entity or person. A theory of rights can be postulated alongside the doctrine of logical correlativity which means the association of the rights of one person with the duties of another, as against the doctrine of moral correlativity which holds that with a view to enjoying rights one must need be able to perform reciprocal obligations. There have emerged two groups who interpret human rights in the ways opposed to each other. One group – they are legal positivists - put forward the view that true rights are those which are set out and enforceable in law. The other group lay stress on the moral aspect of rights which can be recognized by enlightened conscience. We know human beings do not inhabit a universe of shared moral values and different communities nurture and nourish different and independent moral values. Different and diverse communities cohabit or live together in international society. Article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims the right to marriage, subject to the free and full consent of the intending spouses, this clause, it should be mentioned in this context, conflicts with the widespread practice of arranged marriage which many societies are known to regard perfectly consistent with their moral system. Political rights (freedoms of speech, press and assembly; political and legal equality) are

rights held by the individual against the state. By contrast socialist regimes regard human rights from the perspective of their own responsibilities, which means they take it upon themselves to secure the benefits of their people and collective groups, that is, workers, individuals etc, owe their obligations to the societies they live in. The nation of individual human rights lays open a subset of the larger dilemma of tracking down justification outside particular frameworks. In many societies, the individual as a person is regarded as a social construct: individual beliefs, religions, world-views, language, gestures, and mores are all moulded by society and culture. In Marxist ideology rights, emerge historically as they do, point to class-relationship and individual human rights are, as this theory gives us to understand, but reflections of the class interests of the bourgeoisie. By contrast, collective rights are the foundation of human rights and they are preconditions for all individuals to enjoy rights and freedoms equally. They are not, however, abstract ideals; they are expressed concretely in specific laws of various countries. They therefore cannot be understood apart from the laws and the institutions of a country. Differences in national rights speak of the different conceptions of human rights practiced in different countries and there is no universal right evolved to override national laws. There has imperceptibly cropped up a difference between Western and non-Western concepts of human rights, as was evident at the World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993. At this historic conference were stressed by several

official delegations cultural and value differences between Asia and the West. The foreign minister of Singapore voiced a warning – Amartya Sen has quoted this warning in his book, 'Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny' published 2006 by Allen Lane in collaboration with Penguin Books, on page 94 – that 'universal recognition of the ideal of human rights can be harmful if universalism is used to deny or mask the reality of diversity.' The Chinese delegations played a significant role in laying a particular emphasis on regional differences and in ensuring that the prescriptive framework adopted in the declarations made room for regional diversity. 'The Chinese foreign minister,' as says Amartya San. 'put on record the proposition that the Asian priorities demand' that the states' rights must precede individuals' rights. As is seen in the proceedings of the above world conference on human rights, many Asian exponents of human rights have engaged themselves in championing Asian values particularly in reaction to the Western claim to be depository of ideas on liberty and rights. Ironically, there are many proponents of the excellence of Asian values who do not dispute this claim and rather choose to argue that while Europe may have been the home ground of liberty and individual rights, Asian values hold dear discipline and order, and they aver the priority of discipline and order over liberty and rights. The West can keep its individual liberties and rights but Asia can do better by adhering to orderly conduct and disciplined behaviour. Support for liberty and human rights has been articulated no less often in Asia – India,

China, Japan and in various other countries in East, Southeast, South and West Asia – than in Europe. The point to note here is not just the debatable nature of the diagnosis of Asian values and its 5 seriously underestimating the range and reach of the intellectual heritage of Asia, but the thoroughly reactive nature of the genesis of this view. The outcome of the world conference on human rights shed a very dim light on the resistance to Westernization in the world today. This resistance often assumes the form of ideas that are considered Western, despite the fact that these ideas have occurred and flourished historically in many non-Western countries and have gradually become a part of our global past. There is nothing absolutely Western about valuing liberty and defending public reasoning. Their being labelled ‘Western’ is likely to produce a negative attitude towards them in other societies Part of the reason for this fixation with the West, or the alleged West lies in the history of colonialism. Western imperialism, in addition to submerging, over the last few centuries, the political independence of the countries ruled or dominated by the colonial powers, created attitudinal climate which is, in the words of Amartya Sen, ‘obsessed with the West, even though the form of that obsession may vary widely – from slavish imitation on one side, to resolute hostility on the other.’ (Identity and Violence,P.84) It is also important to take cognizance of the fact that serious abuses occurred and the social memory enshrined in prose and poetry of those actual transgressions still enlivens anti-Western attitudes today. It is worth quoting in this context Amartya Sen as

saying, reference Chapter 5 of his book, ‘Identity and Violence’, ‘Now that a warm nostalgia for the empires of yesterday – for the British in particular – seems to be making something of a comeback in Europe (and oddly enough, even in America), it is worth remembering that the perceived sense of colonial inequity was not entirely baseless.’ (P. 85) The role of colonial humiliation in the dialectics of the dominated people, as says Amartya Sen, calls forth at least as much attention as the influence of economic and political asymmetry imposed by the imperial authorities In Pilgrim’s Progress. John Bunyan depicts ‘the valley of humiliation. Bunyan possessed personal experience of humiliation because of his having spent many years in prison. The fact is that he began writing ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ during his second spell of his imprisonment in the sixteen-seventies, the book being published in 1678. The harrowingness of the image of that imagined valley pales into insignificance before the image of indignity and humiliation already suffered by Africa in Bunyan’s seventeenth century world. Africa which pioneered in many developments in the growth of world civilization was beginning to be turned into a continent of European domination and a hunting ground for slaves to be transported like animals to the New World. There is no scope for exaggerating the effects of humiliation on human lives, when we read of the evils associated with slave trade and colonization which have been seen as ‘wars against Africa,’ by the Independent Commission which is chaired by Albert Tevoedjre, the commission identifying

African principal task as winning the war against humiliation. In the words of Amartya Sen, as ‘commission argues, the subjugation and denigration of Africa over the last few centuries have left a massively negative legacy against which the people of the continent have to battle.’ (Identity and Violence; P. 87) I have already walked far beyond the boundary and should restrain myself walking farther. How human rights are being trampled underfoot is not within the purview of my present discussion. World peace will never be achieved if we do not respect human dignity.

I shall conclude this article by dealing with the concept of freedom

The concept of freedom first nourishes itself on mental health practices, entitlement to human rights and on the right to be informed of what is happening in private and public sectors. This concept also enjoins upon every citizen love and respect for his/ her country and for its national flag.

I now navigate our discussion to mental health and other concepts.

Mental health is a psychological state of an individual functioning at a fair-to-middling level of emotional and behavioural accommodation. From the vantage of wholism it encapsulates an individual’s ability to harmonise his activities and his efforts to attain psychological flexibility. The World Health Organization (WHO) characterises mental health as ‘subjective well-being, perceived self-efficacy, autonomy, competence, inter-generational dependence, and self-actualization of one’s intellectual and emotional potential. Among others.’ (Wikipedia). The well-being of an

individual, according to the WHO, owes itself to their abilities being brought to fruition by facing up to normal stresses of life and by contributing to the development of their community. Mental health strengthens in the tendency to work and love.

Mental health is most important in order to maintain a sense of freedom, because it is the successful performance of mental function, a precursor to involvement in productive activities and fulfilling relationships with other people. It also strengthens the ability to adapt to change and grapple with adversity. A person with his/her mental health impaired often wrestles with depression, anxiety, relationship problems and other mental ailments and the sense of freedom stands a long distance from him or her. The concept of human right can never be put to practical use if we do not respect human dignity. Poverty destroys human dignity and peace. Poverty always cowers under the stare of wealth and peace never befriends poverty but plays into the hands of wealth. People in poverty should know how poverty is depriving them of their rights as human beings and how it is capitalised upon to make them servile. In order to understand how they are being deprived by poverty, they must acquaint themselves with the concept of poverty.

Mental health is linked to entitlement to human rights and right to information. Human rights are co-related with the concept of poverty linked to human needs and fulfillment of human needs is a prelude to peace which is itself prerequisite for entailment of freedom. How we can define

poverty is of the essence to political policy and academic debates on the concepts and bound up with explanations, involving value judgment. There is a jumble of definitions. No one has yet settled on any universally acceptable definition. Many researchers have more or less subscribed to the fact that the definition they should adopt must be understood in relation to particular social, cultural and historical contexts. Definitions may vary according to its narrowness or its breadth. Definitions should be constructed in terms of whether they are confined to the nature of material core or whether they subsume relational or symbolic factors linked to poverty. Assuming the function of a definition is to draw a clear distinction between the conditions defined (poverty) and other conditions (non-poverty), we can pitch the definition of poverty towards the narrower end of the spectrum. Another source of variation in definitions of poverty resides in whether they lie entrenched or rooted in conceptualizations, on the one hand, with a person's material resources including income in especial, and, on the other, with actual outcomes in terms of living standards and activities. In practice these two approaches are often treated as complimentary to each other. Individual's freedom is fed on the conceptualization of these two approaches.

Freedom first assures citizens of their right to information about what is going on in private and public sectors connected with their well-being and enjoyment of their rights. It should be mentioned in this connection that the right to information act was passed in 2005, aiming to start out the practical regime of right to information

enabling citizens to gain access to information under the control of public authorities, with a view to fostering transparency and accountability in the working of every public authority. Under 'information' are subsumed records, documents, memos, emails, opinions, advices, press releases, circulars, orders, logbooks, contracts, reports, samples, models, data material held in any electronic form and so on.

Assuming that a universally accepted definition of poverty has been arrived at, the question as to who will execute it naturally proposes itself. It naturally devolves on civil society. Civil society, the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that manifest interests and will of citizens, plays a pivotal role in alleviating poverty to a considerable extent by orienting itself to advocating human rights the poor and downtrodden are entitled to, as are the rich and privileged. The concept of civil society in the pre-modern classical republican understanding owes itself to the early modern thought of Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. But older is its history in the realm of political thought. In general sense civil society has been conceived of as a political association that settles social conflicts by imposing rules to prevent citizens harming their fellow-beings. It can guarantee people freedom in thought and action.

The sense of freedom is not self-oriented at all. It strengthens in the exhibition of love and respect for the national flag, the symbol of a free country. The flag of India is a horizontal tricolor, deep saffron at the top, white in the middle and dark green at the

bottom in equal proportion. The ratio of the width of the flag to the length is two to three. In the centre of the white band is a navy blue wheel representing the Dharma Chakra, the wheel of Law, made in the third-

century BC in the Sarnath Lion Capital at the behest of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka. The Chakra conveys the feeling that there is life in movement and death in stagnation. Freedom is always in movement.