

Pride

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The Chambers Twenty-first Century Dictionary gives a number of definitions of the word 'pride', which include "self respect; personal dignity; the finest state; the prime". In the armed forces esprit de corps and morale are both functions of one's pride in one's regiment, unit, squadron, etc., in which there is the firm belief that it is the finest in the world. It is pride in the regiment which makes a soldier fight till the last bullet and be prepared to sacrifice his life. It is pride in one's country which makes a man volunteer to fight against the country's enemies, it is pride in one's work which makes a person put in his best into whatever he is doing, for a workman to produce items of high quality, for a policeman to do his duty, for a teacher to give the best education to his students, for a cobbler to produce a fine pair of shoes, or the owner of an industry to ensure that whatever his company produces is the finest product in the market. If there is no pride then all work will be lackadaisical and slipshod, there will be no patriotism and there will be lawlessness. These issues are both axiomatic and interdependent. If Gandhiji had no pride in India there would have been no freedom movement, it is because Jaichand had no pride in India that Mohammed Ghauri could defeat Prithviraj Chauhan through betrayal.

The other day a lady, herself from the upper class whose husband was a senior IAS officer and who has enjoyed all the privileges which this country can offer, held forth on how rotten this country is. According to her the joint family was a den of iniquity, our religion and culture have ingrained subordination of women in the Indian psyche, at even her advanced age she was afraid of sexual molestation. The government is rotten, the rural folk are steeped in intrigue and urban folk are lumpenised. Utility services do not function and there is rampant corruption. She is happy that her two sons are in the United States and she never wants them to come back. When it was pointed out that because of lack of gun control the United States has a long record of violence her answer was that despite the fact that one can buy a gun off the shelf there is only sporadic violence, whereas in India this would have led to wholesale butchery. The question arises whether this is the opinion of an individual or whether this is how all Indians think. Is there no patriotism left in India, no sense of pride in the country?

The Vietnamese War was a traumatic experience for the United States. In order to counter the fallacious Domino Theory which stated that success of the Communists in one country would have a cascading effect and bring other countries under subjugation, the United States was drawn into the Vietnam Civil War between Central and South Vietnam. The French, who were the colonial power in the Indo-China, supported the South Vietnam Government. Increasingly the United States became a partner in a wholesale war in which it claimed to be supporting democracy, without a realisation that Ho Chi Min and the people of North Vietnam were fighting a patriotic war to liberate the country from the colonial masters, whereas the government of South Vietnam was a puppet of France. Ho Chi Min had pride in his country, the South Vietnamese leaders had none. Ultimately this deep spiritual force which is a combination of faith in one's cause and one's country, proved to be invincible and Vietnam became the first example of a guerilla movement evolving into a national struggle in which the United States of America was brought to its knees and had to accept the Ho Chin Min Government and withdraw from Vietnam totally. It is the pride of the Vietnamese people in that country and in themselves which enabled them to defeat the might of the United States.

The war had its obverse, which is that amongst the young in America there was a virtual revolt against what was considered an unjust and unjustified war. In the Second World War the Allies prevailed because they fought a war for justice in which they felt pride. In Vietnam the Americans failed because the people of America had no faith in their own country in the justification for the war. The long term effect of the war was that there was a strong streak of disestablishmentarianism built into the American psyche and for some years the Americans were not proud of themselves. This certainly weakened the nation. It is to the eternal credit of Ronald Reagan that through his tub thumping, drum beating insistence on seeing America as the best country in the world, in fact God's own country, that national pride was restored to America and the people started to believe in themselves. Despite the fact that Reagan was often a bumbling conservative one can never underplay his role in restoring pride to America and the Americans. One mentions this because ultimately it is the intangibles which held the country together and make it great. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister, throughout his tenure as the Chief Minister of Gujarat talked about the 'asmita', or pride, of the people of Gujarat. He now talks about the 'asmita' of the people of India. One can quote a personal experience of what pride means. In the eighties of the last century on a visit to Thailand when the author wanted to buy a new suitcase the shopkeeper in Bangkok, on learning that he was an Indian, told him that he could not afford the price. The same author, when visiting the United States in 2007, found an environment of curiosity in India and respect for it because of its technical capabilities and its growing economy. Even taxi drivers waited to know how India had made such progress. One suddenly felt proud of being an Indian, one's chest swelled, the head was held high and one walked erect. How is it possible that in seven short years that pride has evaporated and highly placed people are going around trenchantly criticising their own country?

Let us begin by countering the argument that our culture, our religion and our social mores are all defective. The Sanatan Dharma is the oldest surviving religion in the world which has withstood all the assaults of the revealed religions without breaking or disappearing. At the same time the revealed religions such as Christianity and Islam have always found a welcome in India and added to the multi polarity of this very diverse nation. It is not merely a question of co-existence, but rather a question of mutually beneficial cohabitation. There has been friction at the margin and this has very often led to the adoption of extreme attitudes. But these are all marginal because in the main the truth about happy cohabitation continues to prevail. It does not in Pakistan and, unfortunately, in much of the Arab world today. Is this not a cause for pride in India and its culture? On the material side it would be foolish to deny that China has made much greater progress than India, as a result of which in the matter of social infrastructure and in providing basic services China is ahead of us. At the same time in terms of political organisation we have opted for a genuine democracy whereas China has opted for absolute dictatorship. Which is the better system, one in which the Three Gorges Dam could be built in record time but thirty lakh people were displaced in the process without any protest being permitted, or is it better to have an entire mining and steel manufacturing project almost indefinitely delayed because the voice of a tribal community has to be heard and its interests protected? Our democratic system is inclusive, including of extreme views and though this may lead to a relatively slow pace of material progress ultimately India reaches its objective without inflicting undue pain. The inefficiencies of this system are considered evil by those who have no sense of pride, without realising that at least it protects them from the midnight knock on their door. We may be slow, but we are free. Is this not something of which we should be proud?

This does not mean that there is not a great deal which has not gone wrong in India. For example, in our haste to expand the educational system we have sacrificed quality. Once again there is a democratic dilemma here. Do we deny education to many in order to provide quality for a few? Or do we expand the base of

education to make it universal and then introduce quality so that it is all pervading? There is a great deal of unrest in the country which started as welcome movements for social justice but which have been hijacked by self seeking politicians. In fact this is one of our greatest failures because from the dream of Nehru and the purposive government that he established we have drifted a long way into an era of self seeking politics, corrupt politicians, a complete loss of national pride, with personal gain totally replacing the national interests. Power has been converted to a purchasable commodity which is to be used to enrich the purchaser. All this can happen only if one subverts the organs of the State, including the law and order machinery, the development administration, the regulatory mechanisms and those structures which build an enabling environment for doing business. It is not the joint family or religion which have destroyed our value systems. It is greed which has done it and which has removed all inhibitions, moral, social or even governmental. Crime against women is only one manifestation of this complete breakdown of government. There is insurgency, militancy, separatism, dacoity and crime of every description because we have emasculated our law enforcement agencies through political interference and corruption. In such an environment the law abiding cower and scoundrels stride unchecked. Governments refuse to govern because they feel that decisions relating to governance could lead to temporary unpopularity which could cost votes. As a result of that the organs of government, the Civil Service, the Police, the development agencies have all become corrupt, indecisive, inefficient, ineffective and even predatory. Is this irreversible? Can the economy never recover? The answer has to be an emphatic No.

How does one put India back on the rails? The present government has a comfortable majority and in a democratic environment it can certainly take strong decisions. The first and foremost has to be to trim the government. Perhaps India does not need more than twenty central ministries. Keeping this as a target one has to reduce the ministries by merging those which do like work. The burgeoning bureaucracy at the top level has to be drastically pruned, which means one Ministry having one Secretary with only Additional Secretaries heading departments within the Ministry. This must be ruthlessly adopted and enforced. This should go down to the State and Local government also. There must be maximum devolution of powers to the local governments and the maximum delegation within ministries and departments. Let the lowest functionary empowered to do a particular job be made to do it, but with tangible accountability. There should be ruthless weeding out of the scoundrels, the corrupt, the lazy, the inefficient, the intriguers within the Civil Service so that, starting with the All India Services it is only the best who remain within government. The environment should be one of duty to one's job and the service of the people of India, complete integrity, hard work, diligence, quick decision making and efficient implementation. All extraneous influences must be removed, which means that every functionary works within an environment free of pressure or of fear.

Restoring systems is well within the competence of government and this has to be done with speed. Once the systems are restored government must attend to the task of actually governing and producing results. The highest priority must be given to education and health care so that within a short time frame there is universal coverage by both in which an effort is made to ensure quality. The economic environment should be such that it encourages entrepreneurship, efficient production and industrial expansion and people friendly business which creates meaningful jobs and brings everyone within the employment net. The idea is to unleash the economic energies of our people so that what they do in the United States by way of new start ups they do in India by creating new ventures.

All crime must be ruthlessly dealt with and we must very quickly restore respect for law. This would very swiftly eradicate separatism, Naxalism, terrorism and other forms of violent crimes. Making the police efficient is not all that difficult. What is needed is a clear-cut mandate, the empowerment of the police to

function without fear or favour and accountability which quickly punishes policemen who do not do their duty, harass people or transgress law. After all when the Emergency was declared this very police force was sent a signal throughout India at midnight of 25th June 1975 to arrest a very large number of people who were considered undesirable by the then government and because the mandate was clear, by 0400 hours on the morning of 26th June more than 95 percent had been taken into custody. It was lack of direction which made the police ineffective, not some intrinsic inefficiency from which it suffered. Give the police a firm mandate but keep it on tight leash and it will do wonders, so much so that the lady whose laments started this article would feel completely safe on our streets. Ultimately it is how soon the present government restores a sense of national pride, the pride that every Indian feels because he is an Indian, the restored 'asmita' of our people, which will determine how quickly India will progress. Ultimately it is all a question of pride.

One could break up the task of good government which leads to restored pride somewhat as under: When the Japanese chased the British Army out of Burma and what can at best be called a rabble fled to India it is William Slim, later Field Marshall Slim, who was given the task of rebuilding the Fourteenth Army. His mantra was simple. Every unit was first taught to have pride in itself through training, training and more training, with even noncombatant clerks becoming fighting soldiers. Then the troops were taught not to fear the jungle, but to live in it and off it. If surrounded, bash the enemy, if attacked stand your ground and fight back, never retreat. Aggressive patrolling was encouraged, Japanese lines were infiltrated, the enemy was ambushed and every successful ambush raised morale. Soon the rabble became an army and then XIV Army took the offensive. It did not stop till it had destroyed the Japanese. If Slim could do this to a defeated army, can we not at least restore the systems of government? But, like Slim, we have to move step by step, the first one of which is the restoration of morale. Then comes the use of this instrument to deliver government to our people. Then comes high level policy which can revitalise the country. This would be followed by releasing the latent energy of our people till a stage comes when the country moves into automatic transmission. Government would then become the mentor, the guardian, the protector, the philosopher and guide, but it is the people who will be the prime movers. Pride is what will initially enable this, but thereafter pride would be the motivating force. Chanakya did this for Chandra Gupta Maurya, Modi has to do this for modern day India. If Seleucus Nicator could be defeated, can we not, through good government, defeat the devil of despondency?
