

Wanted: Servant Leaders

In its evolution, the world had gone through many forms of economic theories and its application.

The early industrial revolution had brought entrepreneurship at its best. With the growth of the entrepreneurs' business efforts, capitalism was seeded. The Western European and North American thoughts on capitalism centered on free market, lesser controls, competition, quality, meritocracy, etc. This world was controlled by the supply & demand equation. As it progressed through the laissez-faire days and moved to the Thatcher's, the Reagan's, the Bush's and the rest political agenda, social controls and moral thinking eventually went away completely and greed took over. Money became paramount in life. Money power led to muscle power with which the mighty ones started lording over the under privileged. With the system being what it is, the mighty ones had all the opportunities available to plunder & loot and amass great wealth, either legally or illegally. Whereas in the beginning of the twentieth century the top ten richest nations were only nine times wealthier than the bottom ten poorest countries, today the chasm had increased multifold, to the extent that the top ten richest nations are 130 times richer than the lowest ten poor nations!

S.R. Nair*

Parallel to this in the early twentieth century, the pressure on the poor from the industrialists and those who owned wealth by birth, brought the spirit of socialism and community welfare, with *Das Capital* of Karl Marx giving the idea a structured format. Thus was born communism. The communist theory that is centered on socialism caught the attention of intelligentsia and they tried to carry it forward, only to fall to prey to the autocratic tyrants who eventually controlled the community. History is replete with many cases; be it China, Russia, Germany, Argentina, Zimbabwe or the CIS nations. In the process, communism moved away from the community's welfare into the perceived socialistic wisdom of the autocratic leader who thought of himself as the most righteous and the last word in every thing. From the community centered socialism, communism churned out the worst form of dictatorship and people who had trodden the path got disillusioned. Eventually, with the splintering of USSR, communism bit dust.

“We live in a time of profound change. Science and technology continue to expand our ability to understand and change life.

*The author is Managing Director of Team Frontline Ltd. and a writer on contemporary subjects. E-mail: srn@teamfrontline.com

Economies and societies can no longer be thought of separately, for they are intertwined in a global community. Our actions as individuals and as societies affect not just ourselves but our global neighbors. Now more than ever, it is imperative that we contemplate and understand our relationship between each other and the impact of our actions on each other as individuals, as countries and as inhabitants of our planet”, observes Dalai Lama the Nobel peace laureate. “Be it in politics or science or finance, honesty is important in every line of work. Greed is the source of economic crisis”, he adds further.

Greed led to highest levels of economic upheaval around the world. Though it was fully man made, it had gone beyond man’s control now. And the powerless people, who are marginalized and suppressed, started looking at the outcome as fate accompli. Poor souls, they could do nothing about it!

Today we live in a world where both communism and capitalism had failed considerably. Where had things gone wrong? What led the world to the present plight?

In our societies, human values had changed to make ways for economic theories. Considerations got monetized. And that led to a complete shift from a considerate society to that of a selfish society. We understand that it all happened due to man’s selfishness and lack of concern for his fellow being. When man lost the human thread, the miseries followed.

What is this human thread that binds human beings together? It is the thread that gives the leader - the led, the husband - the wife, the father- the son, the individual – the family and the man - his neighbor. The major constituents of the thread are love, compassion and empathy. When these elements disappeared, the thread weakened. Love and compassion gave away to selfishness and greed. Empathy gave way to apathy. Man started looking at man as enemy. The concern for the neighborhood, the society, the state and country started thinning out. Man got so engrossed to become totally unto himself.

In the olden times there was a concept of servant leadership. Leaders took it as their duty to protect the poor and the downtrodden. Gandhi said, “Service to the poor has been my heart’s desire and it had always thrown me amongst the poor and enabled me to identify myself with them.” He called the dalits as Harijan (God’s children) and went about with their emancipation. In spite of his best try, nothing significant happened in our society. Post his death, all such endeavors got watered down and finally it just became lip service. Though the country progressed and the percentage of below poverty line (BPL) cases came down, a significant lot still remain under BPL, even after sixty two years of gaining independence. There are the ‘rag to riches stories’ of the Ambanis and the like but there still exists untouchability, casteism and societal ostracism in abundance in India.

Guru Gobind Singh, the last Sikh Guru said “Sardar Sirdar” (he who sacrifices the most is a leader). Today we see people of the underprivileged class in Punjab fighting on issues of suppression, exploitation and social ostracism from those very followers of the great Guru. The spirit of sacrifice, of giving and of protecting the children of lesser Gods has stopped even within Sikhism.

Katha Upanishad says “Tesham sukham saswatam. Tesham shanti saswati” (Infinite happiness and infinite peace come to those who see the Self within and serves the Self in all beings). A society which was originally bound by the teachings of Vedas, the Upanishads, the Geeta and the epics such as Ramayana & Mahabharata, had moved away from its tenets and is fully immersed in an ‘any which way of economic progress’ and wealth creation and is not worried about equality, inclusivity, brotherhood & peace that was advised by great teachers such as Shankara, Ramanuja, Madhava and the like.

According to Kautilya’s Raja Dharma, the best king is one in whose kingdom women and shudras (meaning, the lowest in society) do not have tears in their eyes. While shedding crocodile tears about the poor and downtrodden, the ministers, politicians and our leaders have their eyes fully fixed only on amassing wealth and own personal gains. The exceptions are very few that could be counted on the finger tip.

Post 1991, the corporates of the country had gone on overdrive to grow faster so as to catch up with the leading industrial power houses of the world. With its mind fully on competition and profitability, we have very

few companies here worried about social obligation and responsibilities. What is the result? The corporates greatly pollute the country and the earth, exhaust our natural resources in a frenzied pace and indulge in jobless growth that only help the company chieftains and not an iota of the huge population the country has.

It is time for the servant leadership model to re-emerge very strongly in our society. With the welfare of the servants (the followers) as the prime focus in all spheres, be it commerce, politics, academics or social, strong compassionate leadership has to emerge that would preach and practice inclusivity, progress and the welfare of every being.

Examples of servant leadership are plenty. Rama (Ramayana) is a good example of servant leadership. He had only the genuine welfare of his people in his mind. The word ‘Rama rajya’ is an outcome of that. In Bible, Noah is another example. Goutama the Buddha, Emperor Ashoka, Emperor Akbar of the Mughal Dynasty, Sri Chitra Tirunal Balaramavarma- the last reigning king of Travancore kingdom, King Bhumibol Adulyadej Rama the IX of Thailand are some other good examples of servant leadership. Being from Kerala and knowing its history, one can vouch the earning and love of King Sri Chitra Thirunal Balaramavarma for his subjects. While so many political parties here have been claiming it as their achievement to bring about high degree of improvement in Human Development Index of the state, one has to bear in mind about the King’s endeavors in founding innumerable schools and hospitals for his subjects’ way back that led to this far reaching achievement in the state of Kerala.

Leading Indian management Guru Dr N.H. Athreya says: “Either as a strategy or as conviction, unless you subscribe to the spiritual reality of things, servant leadership cannot work. For it comes from the realization that all are children of God, and when serving mankind, you are serving God.”

The same thoughts must have echoed in the mind of one of the world’s leading Gurus, Guru Prof. C.K. Prahalad when he formed the management philosophy of the ‘bottom of the pyramid’ (BoP). For the bottom of the pyramid is full of the suppressed, the outcasts and the marginalized. His heart went for them. Seeing their suffering and yet, seeing the potential of the BoP, he formulated theories and advised the corporates and the institutions of the world to do those activities that benefits the BoP. He advised organizations to benefit by benefiting the poor. He always thought for the marginalized to the extent that his only endeavor (though unsuccessful) as an entrepreneur was called ‘Praja’ (Subject). His thoughts had led to many innovations in products, solutions and services delivered by leading companies. Nano car of the Tatas, e-Choupal by the ITC and Sankara Netralaya at Chennai and many organisations of Tamil Nadu are prime examples of the outcome of his calling.

In the act of mentoring, guiding and directing, we see divinity. It is all about seeing the self in others. Seeing the self in others with the spirit of empathy! Empathy delivers the

virtuosity to man. Virtuosity is part of the divinity that we define.

Though already mentioned, the unstinted great efforts of Mahatma Gandhi for the resurrection of the Indian, was a classical case of servant leadership. Similar was the case of Abraham Lincoln in the United States of America.

The key to ethical, moral and compassionate behavior that is expected of a servant Leader is honesty. A servant leader cannot exist without honesty and that is the fundamental truth. Other related important attributes are integrity, humility, respect for others and the ability to shoulder the responsibility, even if it delivers pain.

In this twenty first century, we see that the world is poised to go through many catastrophes. Global warming, pollution, lack of drinking water, the spread of epidemic and pandemic diseases come at the top on the list. These, when combined with wars, terrorism and natural calamities; pose absolute threat to the continuation of humanity. When man worries only for himself (and not for his fellow beings), the impact of these catastrophes can become multifold. What could save the world from the brink of going under? First and foremost it is the love, compassion and concern that one could have for his fellow beings. When he gets up to help others with the spirit of love and compassion and when he look for the welfare of others with the feeling of empathy, he rises to become a true servant leader.

And, therein lie our hope for the future!

Best compliments from ▶	 www.pdatradefairs.com	 www.pdaevents.com	 www.pdatrademedia.com	 www.pdatrademedia.com
Divisions of Pradeep Deviah & Associates Pvt. Ltd., 'PDA HOUSE', No.32/2, Spencer Road, Frazer Town, Bangalore - 560 005, India Tel.: +91-80-2554 7434 (6 Lines), Fax: + 91-80-2554 2258, E-mail: pdaexpo@vsnl.com				
				