



Valedictory Address

IAS Professional Course -Phase I (2018 Batch)

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.....”*You will not have a united India if you do not have a good All-India Service which has independence to speak out its mind.*”

- Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel



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Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains!

The world of reality has its limits; the world of imagination is boundless...

For the Bright Young Sparks of 2018

Special Directors Manoj and Arti Ahuja, Executive Director of CPSM and CoE designate, Prof. P. Amudha, Course Coordinator Vidya Bhushan, members of the Course Team, my colleagues on the faculty, Ladies and Gentlemen, and of course the *'bright young sparks'* of the 2018 Batch.

A Valedictory Address is an occasion to mark a significant milestone in the journey of one's life - it is a time to reflect and contemplate on issues which are important, but not urgent.

Therefore, I think I will share with you some thoughts about the role of individuals, elites, state, technology and society from some 'competing schools of history'. These include: Thomas Carlyle (History is nothing but the biography of Great Men), Arnold Toynbee (the Civilizational school) and the school of historical and material determinism, which draws from the Marxist perspective

On Heroes and Hero Worship

Let me begin with Thomas Carlyle who wrote his magnum opus: ‘On Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History’ in 1840. According to him, the history of the of the world is but the biography of great men - fortunately for us, he was eclectic in his choice of great men – He began with ***The Hero as Divinity: Odin***, (Wodan in English) the father of all the Nordic gods, and on whom Wednesday is named Odin is remembered because he gave up one eye to drink from the well of knowledge and thereby sought to extend his reign beyond the shores that his forefathers had known, then ***The Hero as Prophet: Mahomed***, the founder of Islam, for he united the entire Arab world under the realm of Islam. This was followed by ***The Hero as a Poet: Dante***, because he chose to write Divine Comedy in Italian, rather than in classical Latin and **William Shakespeare** for bringing out the *universal elements: love, hatred, jealousy, cunning, ambition, sacrifice, and of course the role of chance* on the stage of Life– from Macbeth to Merchant of Venice, Then came ***The Hero as a Priest: Martin Luther*** for standing up to the Pope, and questioning the practice of paying for Indulgences and for translating the Bible into German. After this came

The Hero as a Man of Letters: Samuel Johnson for organizing the first known alphabetic Dictionary of any language – thereby increasing access to knowledge and **Rousseau** – for being the pre-eminent Enlightenment philosopher whose ideas lit the members of the French Revolution and who is best remembered for these lovely quotes: *Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains! / The world of reality has its limits; the world of imagination is boundless... / What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?*

And last, but not the least, ***The Hero as a King*** – and who would fit the description better than **Napoleon**. He is remembered not just for his military strategy, but for laying the foundation of ideas that underpin our modern world – meritocracy, equality before Law, property rights, religious toleration, modern secular education, and an efficient local administration.

Individuals and Institutions

Carlyle's lectures and essays had a seminal influence and led to the Great Man school of history. Obviously it could not include women and men who were born after him - Lincoln, Marx, Bismarck, Tolstoy, Lenin, Mao, Gandhi , Dr Ambedkar, Martin Luther King , Nelson Mandela, and then there were scientists, notably Einstein and Marie Curie, women of literature Pearl S Buck and Virginia Woolf - and men of technology – Bill Gates, Steve Jobs , Elon Musk ... the problem with this theory is that we now realise that in the post-modern age, *individuals are embedded in institutions* – these people were great, but the context was even greater. Virginia Woolf – for example was 'embedded' in the Bloomsbury group and worked in British Museum, and it's difficult to imagine her '*stream of consciousness*' without reference to her group. Moreover, for each of the great men who have been acknowledged, there are many more who have been missed out. And over time, each individual's role becomes a footnote and so we may comfortably state that while *some great men do make history, greatness is also thrust on men who happen to be on the right side of history, for*

history has always been written by the victors. Yet one has to concede the point that great men have looked at things differently – achieved a substantial measure of success, and they were there at the right time!

The Civilizational Perspective

We now move from individuals to civilizations. Arnold Toynbee, the great chronicler of civilizations, articulated that without an understanding of how a particular civilization has evolved and flourished, the major characteristics of its people and their aspirational drivers can never be understood – and this was the key to the understanding of human progress. He studied twenty three civilizations – present and past – ranging from Hellenic (Greek) to Hindu (Indic), Islamic and Sinic (Chinese). While all civilizations are clearly very different from primitive societies – they are all distinct in their worldviews – *thus some civilizations make pyramids, others focus on art and sculpture, some build walls to keep everyone else*

out – others move from their shores to discover new lands, still others lay little emphasis on the material and turn their gaze inwards.

This theory lost favour with the advent of the Cold War, but it has recently been resurrected by Samuel P Huntington who in a counterpoise to Fukuyama's *'End of History'* suggested that in the final analysis, the biggest challenge to the world is the clash of civilizations, and in his world view it would be the Western world against the Islamic civilization. Edward Said has of course, in his counterpoise demolished these arguments.

The Creative Minority

Toynbee's second argument on how each civilization grows and flourishes internally is more significant. He says that every society has a *creative minority* which exercises hegemonic influence over a dominant majority which co-opts/marginalises the 'others'. In today's context, the media plays this role of building 'consensus' for the dominant majority, and

contrarian views are neatly marginalised and side-lined. Actually, this is an abdication of responsibility of the creative minority – which should have guided the dominant majority to incorporate inclusive world views.

My concern is this: *can we be the creative minority* which will build a new consensus for the dominant majority? In many ways, our *Service and LBSNAA* have been playing this role – whether it was first discussion on the rights of losers of land, livelihoods and habitation in Land Acquisition, or the Right to Information or the one on Forest Rights – your *Alma Mater* has been in the forefront. Changes in society, including revolutions and rebellions are driven by an elite which provides the leadership to the dominant majority which gets convinced about the imperative for change.

While this theory has its limitations - it is an important tool to understand how and why societies change. Another takeaway from Toynbee is that men who are endowed with vision can see what many others before them could not. The classic case is that of the pyramids of

Egypt and the ruins of the Capitol Hill in Rome. Why did no one before Gibbon write the 'Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire.' After all, the 'ruins' were there for all to see!

Karl Marx and Historical Materialism

We talked of the two theories involving individuals and elites, but both these are completely discounted by the school of historical materialism which asserts that the *material conditions of a society's mode of production, determine its organization and development.* However, the ultimate irony is that the revolutions spurred by this third theory and the Communist Manifesto have not given us the dictatorship of the proletariat, but dictatorship of men, who have been ruthless in holding on to power. They have built personality cults like never before! Lenin, Mao, Stalin , Ho Chi Min and now Xi Jinping, the life time President of China seem closer to Carlyle's version of history, rather than their own.

This school is also closely aligned with the technological determinist view which says that changes in technology, and specifically productive technology have the primary influence on human social relations and organizational structure. *'The handmill gives you society with the feudal lord: the steammill, society with the industrial capitalist'* (Karl Marx: *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 1847).

Is the Earth Flat?

The current and the most well-known proponent of this school is Thomas L. Friedman. In his bestselling work, *The World is Flat*, he attributes the different phases of globalization to different levels of technology – without ships, navies and industrial revolution, *Pax Britannica* may not have happened. The dramatic reduction in the time and cost of communication has linked people, finance and commodities as never before. The ten "flatteners" that he sees as levelling the global playing field are: the emergence of Windows by Microsoft, *and because it coincided with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, he said, 'when*

the walls came down, the windows came up, Netscape and the Web made the Internet accessible to everyone from five to ninety-five-year-olds. Workflow software, especially STMP and HTML was *'the genesis moment of the flat world*, and the next six flatteners Uploading, Outsourcing, Offshoring, Supply-chaining, Insourcing, Informing and Digitization sprang from this platform.

However the great thing about our times is the counterfactual: nothing goes unchallenged. Robert Kaplan demolishes many of Friedman's arguments in his book 'The Revenge of Geography'. In a very nuanced manner, he argues that geography is the indispensable *'backdrop'* to the human drama of Ideas, Will and Chance. Prof Pankaj Ghemawat points out that 90% of the world's phone calls, web traffic, and investments are local, suggesting that Friedman has grossly exaggerated the significance of the trends.

Looking Beyond Binaries

How do we conclude? The Vedanta tells us that everything is relative and contextual. And that all truths are relative - that there are no absolutes. Unlike the Judaic religions which look at things from a binary (right/wrong perspective), we in India have the remarkable ability to reconcile differences and celebrate diversity in almost everything, and dissent is very much a part of the tradition of learning and argument. Therefore while acknowledging the role of heroes, we should also note their foibles, follies and fallacies. Heroes can be heroes only if they can inspire their teams to do extraordinary work. Heroes have to build consensus, and be good communicators. And in our quest to put our best foot forward in the service of the state and society, the best way to resolve the work life balance is to give equal attention to Dharma, Artha and Kama, and keeping in mind that we all have to superannuate one day - a sense of Moksha. As administrators', your prescribed Dharma is Raj Dharma – the Dharma of the state. *You will dispense justice and patronage without fear or favour, and without discrimination of any kind.* Raj Dharma assures you sufficient Artha, and you

must not lose out on the finer aspects of love, poetry, fine arts, music , erotica and emotional fulfilment – Kama – is an entirely legitimate expression and an essential component of the householder’s Dharma , and then there is Moksha which is best discussed in Phase V!

The Call from Ambedkar

In fine, let me end with a quote from Dr Ambedkar, a Hero, a member of the Creative Minority which gave us a Constitution far ahead of our times, and who believed that Technology will break many of the social barriers affecting our society. And this is also the *Mantra* which I wish to share with you.

“No great man really does his work by crippling his disciple by forcing on them his maxims or his conclusions. What a great man does is to not impose his maxims on his disciples.

What he does is to evoke them, to awaken them to a vigorous and various exertion of their faculties.”

Again the pupil is not bound to accept his master’s conclusions. There is no ingratitude in the disciple not accepting the maxims or the conclusions of his master. For even when he rejects them, he is bound to acknowledge to his master in deep reverence. ‘You awakened me to be myself: for that I thank you.’ The master is entitled to no less. The disciple is not bound to give more.”

Jai Hind