

Editorial

Monday, October 1, 2018

Power of humility

Man's greed knows no bound. The urge to take in that bit more than what is rightfully ours has been the genesis of so much evils and ills in the society. Such a habit also infringes on other's rights and privileges. Yet almost always, it turns out that it is those who are more knowledgeable and informed individuals who are doing the dirty deeds of infringing. The issues of kickbacks and underhand deals in Government contracts and supplies are nothing new. It has been the bane of many otherwise respectful and well-meaning leaders and powerful figures. But when such issues do break out, it never fails to elicit amazement and anger from the public, and are also a source of amusement for many, given the efforts and thoughts that is being invested in pulling out such schemes and also the ingenious ways employed for the same- tactics, had these been utilized legally and for the good, would have definitely made a visible positive impact on the development of the society.

"Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth". Albert Einstein on Mahatma Gandhi.

A man with nothing more than a loin cloth around his waist and the conviction of the truth he holds as his sole and greatest weapon challenged, and ultimately forced the mighty British empire to relinquish its economic and political stronghold over India. What the man, born as Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and revered as the 'Father of the Nation' exemplified was the perceived frailty and humility turning out to be his greatest strengths. Born on October 2, 1869, he was a wayward child, as mediocre as anyone, full of curiosity and childhood enthusiasm. After attaining education and real life experiences from various countries, he realized the futility of oppressive politics and physical domination without the conviction of one's actions.

On his birthday today, the country, and the rest of the world as well are still remembering the person. What still remain true for the people today as it was then are the principles that Gandhi lived and preached. The principles of non-violence, self-reliance and rationality, among others, perhaps has more relevance in today's world more than ever, what with the increasingly violent and impatient nature we all are developing, inadvertently or otherwise. We are also witnessing an increased dependence on central funds and largesse for the development of the state given that there is an evidently regressive development and no sustainable progress worth mentioning.

The state government, despite continuing pressure and outcry from the public, had carried on with its own agenda and justifications. Case in point-seems like the main resource of the state are in deep trouble, with no permanent solution in sight except for some measures which is known to everyone that something which is not right is being committed.

On development issues, the declaration of intent to construct a permanent bridge over Makru river, efforts are in full swing to beautify the Kangla moat - a landmark which is still in remarkably good condition given the dilapidated state of most other landmarks in the city to attract tourists, at best, throw a cursory glance, with no expenses spared.

The Imphal-Moreh road- another vital route linking the border town of Moreh with the capital of Imphal and a source of income for thousands of small businessmen in the state, is still unsafe for transportation of heavy goods. It would be interesting to read the state government's take on the matter, only if for the entertainment factor. One other principle Gandhi espoused was that of developing a rational mind. It would not be difficult for anyone to guess how far we have strayed from that objective. The present social conflicts and misunderstandings spawned by false propaganda and ethnically tainted rumors is today threatening to tear the state and plunge it into chaos and violent mayhem, all because we failed to reason with ourselves and instead chose to go with the flow which is unfortunately steered by self-centered and biased leaders.

The increasing pace of competition and development calls for a greater control of our emotions, actions and intentions, and it is times like now when one needs to turn to the life of people like Gandhi's for inspiration and vindication of our thoughts and beliefs.

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Women's Struggles in Self-Determination Movements

(ANNA ROSARIO DEJARLO MALINDOG deliberated this speech on occasion of Arambam Somarendra Memorial Lecture)

"To live is to be among men, and to be among men is to struggle, a struggle not only with them, but with oneself with passions, but also with one's own"

- Dr. Jose Rizal

Mr. President, Prof. W. Nabakumar, Chairman of the Arambam Somarendra Trust, Dr. Lokendra Arambam, scholars, academics, comrades, friends and colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, a pleasant day to everyone.

It is indeed my pleasure and gratitude to be invited here and to be with you all to commemorate the memory of heroism, courage and compassion of a man that had served his motherland. To be honest with you, I don't know much about Somarendra Arambam, the man we are honoring today. I also confess that I know little about this land, which faces challenges in its fight for freedom, justice and self-determination. But I do know one thing for sure: that, many nations, races, and peoples who are passionately and sternly fighting for the same ideals share the long struggle of the people of Manipur. For instance, the ethnic nationalities of Burma/Myanmar represent one concrete example of nations and peoples who are still fighting and struggling for their claims towards peace and justice, self-determination and independence. Despite the so-called "democratization process" that, according to many, Burma/Myanmar is going through nowadays, the peoples of Burma/Myanmar, the ethnic nationalities to be more specific, are still asserting and fighting for their claim to self-determination, and this is why civil wars are still devastating Burma/Myanmar.

Similarly, the struggle of the Moros of Mindanao in my beloved country, the Philippines, is another embodiment of the quest for these nationalities to gain their independence and political autonomy from the Philippine central government. Despite having lately signed the "Bangsamoro Agreement" with the Philippine government, the Moros of Mindanao are still are not very sure if, indeed, their long-fought for relative political autonomy, that to a great extent embodies their claim to independence and self-determination, will indeed be realized, and be given to them without fighting another civil war. Another case study we can look at the moment is the struggle of the people of Aceh to be a separate and independent nation state inspired by the successful liberation movement and the victory of the East Timorese people which gained independence from Indonesia and became a nation state.

Liberation movements similar to that being waged by the peoples in Aceh, Moro, Burma/Myanmar abound in Southeast Asia and beyond in contemporary times. And they remain steadfast and strong in their fight for freedom, justice and independence, no matter what the costs. The importance of Self-Determination

The issues of self-determination and independence have always confronted peoples and nations of Southeast Asia and beyond since time immemorial. Since the time of colonization and imperialism until today, the age of globalization and modernization, nations and races of Southeast Asia and beyond are still struggling and fighting for their independence and self-determination. These struggles have produced various movements that became the catalysts behind the quest for self-determination and independence of nations. And one of the various movements that have played quite a critical and significant role in these struggles of nations and peoples toward freedom and independence is the women's movement.

But before I proceed further, let me

share my thoughts about what self-determination and independence mean to me, not necessarily as a human rights and political activist, and not even as an academic, but just from a perspective of one who has witnessed the struggles of peoples in their tussle for nationhood and identity.

For me self-determination is the embodiment of independence and freedom of people to define who they are as a nation and what constitutes their identity as a collective. It is the imperative of a nation to define the tone and tenor of its destiny as a people in consonance with their beliefs, traditions, customs and their culture in general, without being suppressed and being constrained or dictated by any external forces, or governments, or by another state. This is for me the simple definition and true essence of self-determination as a right and as an ideal.

The right to self-determination of peoples and nations is given prior attention and importance by the United Nations, as it is recognized and built into two of the most prominent and well-recognized UN international instruments namely, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). These UN instruments have recognized and asserted the right of peoples to self-determination in a holistic and inclusive manner which, substantially, means that self-determination is the fundamental right of peoples and nations to define their political status and identity as a collective, and their place in the global society of peoples and nations, based on the principle of equal rights, manifested by the liberation of peoples from foreign subjugation and colonization, or any external aggressions. This very recognition being espoused by the United Nations on the importance of self-determination as a fundamental right of peoples and nations, is already a signification that, indeed, the struggles and fights for this ideal is a legitimate cause that should be respected and honoured both by states and governments alike.

Liberation Movements
Almost all countries in Southeast Asia, in one way or the other, have produced liberation movements for various reasons and causes. My country, the Philippines, is one of those countries in Southeast Asia which has had the dubious distinction of being colonized by a number of countries. First, it was the Spain which colonized Philippines. Later, the American colonization and Japanese occupation followed it successively. We have had our own home-grown Marcos dictatorship.

From colonial times until not very long ago, Philippines have produced numerous liberation and underground movements that are continuously fighting for the freedom, justice, independence, and the right to self-determination of Filipinos in general, of our Muslim brothers and sisters in Mindanao, and the indigenous communities of my country, who are fighting for self-determination against successive waves of colonialists and, in contemporary times, over their ancestral lands being taken away from them drastically by corporatist institutions.

Some of the most famous and very historic liberation groups of my country during the time of the Spaniards were the KKK or Kataas-taasang, Kagalang-galang, Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan/ The Highest, the Most Respected Collective of the Sons and

Daughters of the Nation. This movement was responsible for ushering in the 1896 Revolution waged by Filipinos against the Spaniards. During the Japanese colonization, we had the revolutionary group named the Huk-Balalahap or Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon/The Forces of the Nation against the Japanese, which spearheaded the Philippine war for independence against the Japanese occupation. During the Marcos dictatorial regime, the CPP-NDF-NPA or the Communist Party of the Philippines, National Democratic Front, and the New People's Army led the underground and leftist liberation and revolutionary groups of my country fighting against the Marcos dictatorship alongside the Filipino masses together with different the sectoral activist groups. Though liberation groups existed at different times in our history as a nation, there are two commonalities among them. First and foremost is their steadfast adherence and commitment of these collectivities to ideals of freedom, justice, and independence of our nation from external aggression and foreign and oppressive forces. Second, ordinary men and women committed and passionate in standing and fighting for the freedom and independence of my country from all these oppressive forces have been the base of these liberation movements. The same is true in the case of Burma/Myanmar, a homeland that has been sick and wounded for a long time. It is a home to men and women who are scattered, desolate and uncertain wanderers parched by the various toxics of social unrests, economic hardships, a long standing civil wars between the ethnic revolutionary groups and the Burmese military regime.

This is indeed the very image of Burma/Myanmar, figuratively speaking, wherein many Burmese as well as their ethnic nationalities counterparts like the Shans, the Kachins, the Karens, the Mons, the Rakhines, the Karenni have felt compelled to form liberation and revolutionary groups to fight for their freedom and independence from the military regime. However, the ethnic nationalities of Burma alongside the struggle against the Burmese army, has one important aspiration that has been a consistent pre-occupation of these peoples, and until now, they are still struggling with, and that's their fight to become independent nation-states. This very ideal is one of the sustaining aspirations that revolutionary groups like the Karen National Liberation Army or the Karen National Union, the Kachin Independent Organization or the Kachin Independent Army. On another plane, national movements like the National League for Democracy (NLD), which is the political party of the democratic icon of Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi, is spearheading the struggle for national self-determination.

Moreover, in this whole gamut of liberation movements that I have been discussing, I guess one critical aspect that is worthy of close examination is the role that women have played in the various struggles for peace and freedom, independence and self-determination in various contexts and situations.

The Role of the Women
One of the many forces and strengths of liberation movements that have been more often than not underrated is the role of women and women's movements. However, if one looks closely at the liberation movements across regions and continents, one will become aware that the role of women in these

liberation movements has either been obfuscated in most cases or pushed to the peripheries.

This is indeed a sad picture since women, just like their men counterparts, have been equal partners in such endeavors and have contributed equally to the success of any liberation movement. In the experience of my country the Philippines, for example, I can attest to the active role that women played in liberating my country from external aggressors during the colonization period as also now in fashioning appropriate responses to the new challenges that my country faces in its existence in this contemporary globalized and modernized world. Furthermore, the experience of women in Burma as the people struggle for freedom and self-determination for at least the last 60 years is indeed a manifestation as well of the important role that women play in freedom and independence movements.

On the other hand, if one will venture outside the region of Southeast Asia, and take a look at the context of African States, one will see that the role of women in national liberation movements and calls for independence have been crucial all across Africa. In the struggle against external aggressions since the time of colonization, women in Africa had played various roles that supported the liberation movements. Their roles ranged from being the nurturing women who usually tended to the wounded, keeping the camps of their male counterparts in order, cooking and seeing to it that their male counterparts in the liberation movements are well fed and healthy, to being women who joined the ranks of their male counterparts in the arms struggle, and fighting together with their male comrades in marching and protesting against various oppressions, aggressions, injustices, and unjustifiable alien subjugations of their motherlands. For instance, in Algeria during the Algerian War for Independence, there were 10,000 women fighters in the National Liberation Front (FLN). Algerian women fought side by side with their men counterparts. They served as combatants, spies, fundraisers, couriers, and nurses in their movement for independence and liberation. As people fought for their independence in Ghana in 1951, women were tasked to be propagandist secretaries who traveled across Ghana staging political and educational meetings and recruiting people into their political party. After the independence of Ghana, women played a crucial role as organizers, politicians and journalists in the transitional government of Ghana in 1957. And in the 1960s, women's organization was consolidated into one big umbrella organization and that was the National Council of Ghana Women.

In the case of Namibia, its women were very much involved in the guerrilla and liberation war of the country. The involvement of the women in Namibia in the resistance movements dates back from the time that this country was colonized by foreign invaders like the Germans and the South Africans. One of the phenomenal advocacies of women in Namibia during the time of the German colonization was the launching of "sexual intercourse strike" to pressure their men to fight and end the German occupation of their country. They also vowed not to bear children until the time that Namibia will be free from German subjugation.

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