

PRIMACY TO DUTY CONSCIOUSNESS

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Rights and duties are like two sides of a coin. Duty is that which is owed by one person to another. Correspondingly, the latter has a right against the former. If we look at the relationship of master and servant, we notice that the servant has certain duties to perform towards his master which become the rights of the master.

2. All of us have some duties and some rights. If we expect others to be conscious of their duties towards us, it is but fair that we should be equally conscious of our duties towards them. As rights are beneficial, they are easily remembered and asserted. Human nature being what it is, it tends to ignore or even forget the duties as they are onerous. It is the fight for right that is the root cause of conflicts and violence, paving the way for anarchy.

3. Duty consciousness is indeed a civilised concept. When man first appeared on this earth, he very much behaved like most of the animals trying to grab what he wanted from others, unmindful of the pain and suffering he was inflicting by such usurpation. It is only in the course of development of the society that the man realised that if he were to live in peace and free from fear and anxiety that he should respect the rights of others so that he can expect others to respect his own rights.

4. There is a qualitative difference between right consciousness and duty consciousness. Duty consciousness is qualitatively superior as there is an element of selflessness in it as against right consciousness which has an element of selfishness. Man having realised that peaceful atmosphere is very vital for enjoying life, evolved a social organisation wherein every member of the society is required to be conscious and perform his duties to qualify himself as a member of the orderly society. The society has evolved procedures and prescribed sanctions to ensure due performances of duties by all its members. In one sense, an important facet of civilisation is the concern for other's rights, privileges, comforts and conveniences – and thereby substituting the rule of 'right is might' in place of the law of the jungle that 'might is right'.

5. The ethos of Indian Epics, the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the Vedas and Upanishads is Dharma. The Sanskrit word 'Dharma' is a very comprehensive concept to convey duty, law, religion, code of moral conduct, etc. Though the English expression 'Duty' is not adequate to convey all that Dharma com-

prehends, let us take the nearest appropriate word 'Duty'. One of the important aspects of our ancient educational system was to teach Dharma, i.e., duty and not what one's rights are. The king or the ruler was taught what his duties towards his subjects were. The student (Shishya) was told what his duties were and the teacher (Guru) was told about his duties towards his student (Shishya). The wife had to remember her duties towards the husband and the husband his duties towards his wife. The host had to perform his duties of Athitisatkar to his guest. The thrust of the ancient system was to emphasise one's duties and not rights. As the emphasis was on duties, the corresponding rights of others stood automatically assured. Rama went to forest in exile to discharge his duty towards his father. Harishchandra readily prepared himself to take the role of the watchman of the graveyard to comply with his duty, to keep up his word. These are the noblest examples of the ethos of our country of duty consciousness. During the freedom struggle, our people sacrificed their lives and properties in discharge of their duty towards their motherland, without, in the least, expecting anything in return. It would be relevant to recall the famous call given by Mr. John F. Kennedy when he told his countrymen: "Ask not what the country can do for you, Ask what you can do for your country" In other words, he asked the people to remember their duties first.

6. Mahatma Gandhiji has in his simple words explained the importance of duty in the following words :

"I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that 'all rights to be deserved and preserved, came from duty well done. Thus the very right to live accrues to us only when we do the duty of citizenship of the world. From this one fundamental statement, perhaps it is easy enough to define the duties of Man and Woman and correlate every right to some corresponding duty to be first performed. Every other right can be shown to be a usurpation hardly worth fighting for".

7. After Independence we gave ourselves the Constitution proclaiming the fundamental rights of the citizens. The emphasis is clearly on rights, on the lines of the Western thinking, inspired by the Magna Carta of England and the Bill of Rights of the U.S.A., etc. We have adopted the Westminster type of democratic form of Government. The democratic apparatus has been in operation for more than 40 years and several elections have been conducted to the Parliament, the State Legislatures and other local authorities. The candidates, with a view to persuading the electorate to vote for them have been competing in dinning into the ears of the voters as to what their rights are and as to who has encroached upon them and that they will, if elected, restore their rights to them.

The emphasis on rights is so much that the voter is made to believe that he has only rights and no duties. By this process the Indian society which was basically and historically a duty-conscious society, has been transformed into an utterly selfish right-conscious society. This has contributed to transforming the peaceful and orderly society into a rebellious and utterly selfish society. We hear day in and day out the cry of fighting for the rights of one section against another. By this overplaying of rights, we have ignored the duties. Speaking of duties is out of fashion. Every one wants more pay, more perks and privileges, but less number of hours of work and more holidays, etc. The duties are neither remembered nor emphasised. The strikes and abstaining from work and other forms of agitations result in fall in production and cause inconvenience and hardships to innocent consumers. Schools, colleges, universities do not function - Government offices are closed. Even the superior Courts are not spared. People are killed and public properties are looted and destroyed in the course of the fight for rights. Nobody bothers about his own duties. This has led to inefficiency, loss of production, corruption and violence. Our society is fast drifting towards anarchy. What is developing is shirk-culture and not work-culture. It is unfortunate that we have not paid enough attention to duties.

8. Duties lovingly performed are actually as good as deeds done. The strength of a Nation is built upon the solid foundation of duties, first and foremost. Today, there seems to be an unprecedented clamour for rights. In the process, duties are relegated to the background. If one's rights are important, how can others' rights be less important ! For every right claimed, there is a duty to be performed. The duty well performed gives legitimacy to the right claimed.

9. Some attempt has, no doubt, been made—26 years after the Constitution came into force—to incorporate in our Constitution the duties of its citizens. Article 51A was added by Constitution 42nd Amendment Act, 1976 whereby only a few of the duties like abiding by the Constitution, safeguarding public property and abjuring violence, etc., have been incorporated. Though fundamental rights are enforceable in a court of law, the duties are not so enforceable. Thus, this is only an attempt to show lip-sympathy to duties. We all know that India, after Independence, has not been able to make substantial progress as was cherished and expected. One reason for this situation is that we seem to be in the mood to fight for rights alone unmindful of our duties. It is high time that this trend is reversed and primacy for duties and duty-consciousness restored. We should reshape our Constitution, our ethos and style of governance by giving primacy to duty and establishing a duty-conscious society in place of the right-conscious society. Sooner the enlightened people of our country address themselves to this task, the better it is for our Nation.