

# Can Dharma be Protected?

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In times as ancient as required words of wisdom to be penned and carved in Sanskrit, someone once said that if one endeavoured to protect Dharma, Dharma would meet that person halfway and render a reciprocal protection, but if one undermines Dharma, then Dharma will inexorably take its toll.

Mahatma Gandhi said as much to our colonial masters in his characteristically crisp way. He said, "*It is the means which justify the ends and not vice-versa*".

In the context of our struggle to shake ourselves free from the colonial yoke, this point was moot. We got our independence not because we were stronger or braver or smarter or richer than the British. Though there is a temptingly cynical perspective that would urge that we certainly could talk much more than the British, and did so, it must be fairly stated that we got our independence on moral and ethical grounds. The British carved a swathe through the country so long as we fought with cloak and dagger, but they had no answer to Satyagraha. The power of truth and sense of righteousness gave our people and our leaders the edge, and as for as long as they fought on the side of Dharma, the British, with all their might, stayed firmly on the back foot.

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Those were good times while they lasted. There was neither power nor money in politics, but freedom fighters came in the thousands only on the courage of their conviction, with no desire for self aggrandisement. No return was contemplated on the investment. The means justified the ends.

Echoing that sentiment while speaking in the constituent assembly, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru said and I quote:

*"I must frankly confess that I am a socialist and a republican, and I am no believer in kings or princes or in the order which produces the modern kings of industry who have greater power over the lives and fortunes of men than even the kings of old, and whose methods are as predatory as those of the old feudal aristocracy. I recognise however, that it may not be possible for a body constituted as is this National Congress, to adopt a fully socialistic programme. But we must realise that the philosophy of socialism has gradually permeated the entire structure of society the world over and almost the only points in dispute are the pace and method of advance to its full realisation. India will have to go that way too if she seeks to end her poverty and inequality, though she may evolve her own methods and adopt the ideal to the genius of her race".*

Pundit Nehru had some very special ideas... the generous deployment of industry with a view to benefiting the poor, and not the rich! And keeping the socialism debate aside, it is an idea that forms even today, the backbone of our industrial structure and our economic growth. It is probably the only programme of poverty alleviation in India that has worked. Even in the context of business, Pundit Nehru made the means not only to justify the ends, but also to fructify the ends. With a modest budget allocation of Rs.200 crores, he established so many industrial organisations and undertakings, in heavy engineering, communications, mining and metals, oil and gas, consumer goods and hospitality, banking and insurance, nearly in every facet

of industry and commerce. A nation was industrialised for the nation's sake, and not the industrialists'. For the statistically inclined, it may be relevant to note that with a comparative fortune in Rs. 3 lakh crores, our previous finance minister has failed to establish one single, solitary industry to match Pundit Nehru's crop.

Naturally, the environment of industrialisation and development as fostered by Pundit Nehru's policies permeated to the industrial culture of its times, which saw the emergence of a large number of entrepreneurs in a variety of fields. All of them had only a common call to meet, the call to scrupulously adhere to the objectives of the company without indulging in any questionable methods. To ensure that companies maintained proper accounts and delivered credible reports, the office of chartered accountants and other regulatory agencies was put to extensive use.

The great work which Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru did, of establishing a heavy and indigenous industrial framework was never repeated by his successors. Instead, they set about exploiting those industrial institutions to the hilt, such that many of them had to close down with the passage of time. The departments of income-tax and central excise played a similarly predatory role, creating gargantuan and illegal demands and forcefully appropriating such dues. The few that have survived to this day, are the proverbial NAVARATNAS. They still do excellent work, generate profit for their shareholders, and help the common man grow. They do not sell substandard steel. They compete with the world leaders in heavy engineering goods, and keep India in the hunt when it comes to a competitive advantage on costs and know-how. They put up petrol pumps in commercially unviable areas,

knowing that such devices help regions and areas develop. They put up telephone lines without worrying about network usage. They even give loans without hiring collection agents!

A lot has changed since Pundit Nehru's idyllic times. The world has become very competitive. It has both globalised and liberalised. Communication has shrunken the world to the size of a village, and in the village, nations survive on global trade. Until recently, there weren't many takers for business with India. The fear of India's widespread corporate corruption and the mistrust of governmental arm-twisting kept most international business houses at bay. On a perceptual level, this trend was quashed largely by the phenomenon we call Infosys. The redoubtable Narayan Murthy proved to the world that dealing with India was a staunch business proposition. The old values were at work again... Value was created and put in the people's hands. The nation grew as an industry did. The ethics were non-negotiable, and glaringly so. The means justified the ends.

Many observed the success of Narayan Murthy and Infosys, and fashioned their structure and strategy on an analogous basis. Few though were able to manage a successful cloning. Some of them could not last long because their inherent propensity for short-cuts and illusory advantages punctured their further rise. Many did not realise that Narayan Murthy and his ilk were flourishing not because of any inherent luck or because of the help of the forces of expediency, but were scrupulous to the teeth, and would not brook anything questionable in their path.

One such company has recently crashed. It is said that the influence of politicians has a lot to do with the thousands of crores of cash that never were. In its heyday, the company seems to have patronised a politician then in power, and when the bedfellow fell from grace, the company promptly switched sides to the incumbent from an opposing party. Milked by the business of politics, the company today has become a case-study in the politics of business. Had only the means been well chosen, the ends would have certainly been different.

In a nation where corruption is so common, you may find it surprising how people still keep referring to concepts of truth and honesty and fairness. And these people are not opium-headed hermits. The man who said truth is God gave us our freedom. The man who made '*Satyameva Jayate*' a national insignia built our industrial framework as we know it today. These are people who must have faced the hazards of fickle minds and negotiable morals day in and day out, myriad times more than we do, as they set about their work. And they seemed quite clear that they weren't advocating this honesty thing because it made them feel nicer, but because they actually believed it worked better. Then they showed us as much.

They probably gave out the truth slogan as a warning, as a modicum of wisdom from their efforts and endeavours. They were at the cross-roads scores of times, and saw how people who swerved from the straight path shone momentarily and then floundered. Which is piquantly why every rupee carries as a promissory note, the promise of better times ahead if the scruples remain non-negotiable, the promise of Dharma's help if we only take the first step.