

How Can We Survive the Clash of Civilisations?

It was in an article published way back in 1993 in *Foreign Affairs* that Samuel P. Huntington had declaimed that the post-Cold War conflicts would not be ideological or economic, but cultural. He said, "The local conflicts most likely to escalate into major wars shall be those along the fault lines separating the civilisations from one another." The next world war, he further said, shall be a war between civilisations. Since Huntington came out with this thesis, reams have been written arguing for and against it.

But any claim of a 'clash of civilisations' springing from divergent religious beliefs represents an oversimplification of the reality. As Amartya Sen wrote in 2003, 'this single-dimensional categorisation of human beings and the increasing tendency to overlook the many identities that any human being has trying to classify individuals according to a single pre-eminent religious identity is an intellectual confusion that can animate dangerous divisiveness.' Such overlooked identities include nationalities, locations, classes, occupations, social status, languages, politics and economic status. That is why Huntington thesis has been called reductionist, over-simplistic and one-sided.

Focussing just on the grand religious classification is not only to miss other significant concerns and ideas that move people, it also has the effect of generally magnifying the voice of religious authority. The insistence, if only implicitly, on a choiceless singularity of human identity not only diminishes us all, it also makes the world much more flammable. Our ontology as a human being gets challenged, when our multi-layered existences are all telescoped into a uniquely powerful categorisation.

Many such statements and actions of the West including their stated determination to ensure march of freedom in these 'rogue' states or non-Judeo Christian societies have also been responsible for the birth of such Frankensteinian forces as Osama bin Laden. Many of these terrorists and terror groups have been functioning with impunity and more often than, their activities have caught us unawares, at the receiving end. Even though, they do manage

to succeed to perpetrate atrocities on humanity, they definitely need to think as to what they wish to achieve with such means. As Gandhi would have said, the employment of evil means even in pursuance of a just cause often starts corrupting good intentions and just causes enough to corrupt them. And, one really fails to gauge the real motive or usefulness of many mindless terrorist killings or the purpose behind them.

See the examples the world over. All the places where the revolutionary forces were animated by their conviction of systemic change and employed violence means for the achievement of the same, they have all either vanished or accepted the inevitability of the values of liberal democracy. Be it fascism, Nazism, communism or any other ideology, they have all been overpowered by the values of liberal democracy which gives choice to the people to shape their destiny as per their desire. While this victory of liberal democracy may not really have sounded the death-bell of ideology as claimed by Daniel Bell in his 'End of Ideology' or by Francis Fukuyama in his 'End of History', it definitely warrants that other ideologies need to adapt themselves rather than be confined to a straitjacket.

Now the point is that at a time when the world is increasingly becoming 'borderless' as Keniichi Ohmae has been talking for quite some time and when the State's sovereign power to defend its citizens and act as the overpowering sovereign, has been severely dented by many newer developments including existence of inter-continental ballistic missiles, international organisations, international law, internet and international terrorists, how long can we continue to rely on the capacity of the nation-states to defend their citizens against such forces of darkness.

It is increasingly felt that the concept of the nation-state has become archaic and we need to move beyond it to talk of a literally borderless world which can be truly globalised. The United Nations need to be given more teeth in such a world and the member states should be more than willing to cede it some powers if they want it to be effective. Today's global problems warrant a global response. So, the nation-states need to coordinate their actions to fight common evils. Be it the operation of the capital market, the effects of a global warming or the operation of international terrorism, you are affected. You have to join forces with the other members of the comity of nations to survive or otherwise you should be ready to perish.

In fact, the sole problem with the extant ineffective world system appears to be the fact that many states continue to be mired in history as pointed out by Francis Fukuyama in his celebrated 'End of History' theory. Such states are those who continue to deny basic freedoms to their citizens. The absence of an open society, fed and nourished by a free debate among the contending ideas, often give rise to forces whose blinkered vision leads to negative channelling of human energies as experienced in case of terrorism.

Although even though the entire world pays lip service to democracy today, there is still no global consensus on the self-expression values—such as social tolerance, gender equality, freedom of speech and inter-personal trust – that are crucial to democracy. The extent to which a society emphasises these self-expression values has a surprisingly strong bearing on the emergence and survival of democratic institutions.

Today, the divergent socio-political values constitute the real clash between the closed and the open societies everywhere. Many of these closed societies lack the core political values

which are usually supposed to facilitate a representative democracy. They include separation of religious and secular authority, rule of law and social pluralism, parliamentary institutions of representative government and protection of individual rights and liberties as the buffer between the citizens and the power of the state.

The World Value Survey reveals that at this point in history, democracy has an overwhelmingly positive image throughout the world. According to the latest Freedom House ranking, almost two thirds of the countries around the world are now electoral democracies. This is a dramatic change from the 1930s and 1940s, when fascist regimes won overwhelming mass approval in many societies and for many decades, communist regimes had widespread support. Now that there seems to be a consensus that democracy is the best form of government, we need to ensure that the same becomes the form of government everywhere, if required, with necessary local modifications. Benjamin Barber, a political scientist, also said in 2003 that 'a war between Jihad and MacWorld (symbolising today's liberal society) can be won in favour of the international civil society only with the untrammelled march of democracy on this planet.

So, what we need today to secure ourselves against the marauding terrorists on the loose is a coordinated action among all the member of the Comity of Nations through the agency of a reinvigorated United Nations, while simultaneously trying to continue a dialogue with these forces of revisionism including terrorism within the doctrinal framework of liberal democracy. The victory of the democratic discourse over the forces of darkness is the ultimate Holy Grail which should be pursued by us all, if at all we wish to save this planet.

Salient Points

- Classifying entire humanity just on religious lines overlooks significant concerns and ideas that move people
- As Gandhi said, the employment of evil means even in pursuance of a just cause often starts corrupting good intentions.
- Be it fascism, Nazism, communism or any other ideology, all got overpowered by the values of liberal democracy.
- In the age of borderless world, we cannot rely on the capacity of the nation-states to defend their citizens against forces of darkness.
- Global problems like terrorism, climate change, etc. warrant a global response through a reinvigorated UN.
- No global consensus exists on the self-expression values – such as social tolerance, gender equality, freedom of speech, etc.
- Divergent socio-political values constitute the real clash between the closed and the open societies everywhere.
- The victory of the democratic discourse over the forces of darkness is the ultimate Holy Grail.

Glossary

Reams: a standard quantity of paper

Rogue: a dishonest person

Marauding: undertaken for plunder (to rob))

Holy Grail: a cup that in medieval legend was associated with unusual powers, especially the regeneration of life