

Idea, Ideology and Power

Idea, Ideology and power are closely linked terms and they often combine to draw up the socio-political and economic canvas at various levels in the world. In this article, we will try to analyse how they are related and how it impacts our day-to-day life.

Idea is an ambiguous term. It has several connotations. It can be treated as a point of view, a perspective, a thought, or a belief, a reaction based on cognition and experience or simply a response to stimuli. Ideas can emerge either out of the subconscious or conscious. Whatever connotation you prefer, it surely leads to an ideology.

A set of ideas which are complementary to each other and have common objectives leads to the formation of an ideology. In ideology, reforms are acceptable to an extent but the core philosophy and objectives remain sacrosanct. For instance, in socialism eliminating inequality and equitable distribution will always remain an important aspect while in capitalism right to property will all be upheld. Certain aspects of the ideology are enshrined.

An entity derives power through its ideas and ideology. In today's world power is delegated to one whose ideas or ideology is relevant with respect to the time. Especially in democracies, power is derived by appealing to people. In dictatorships, the power is derived from sheer force and oppression. But somewhere the lack of extreme resentment and lack of internal revolt indicate that the people accept the current system of government and the power construct in regimes. Some positive reforms will be enough to reduce the resentment to the level that it will have a negligible impact. China along with brutal oppression also focused on eliminating poverty. Reducing poverty levels, increasing living standards and economic growth eliminated all the reasons for people to vigorously revolt. However, this is not the case with all the other dictatorships. But in every case, we can see that the power is derived through the ideology which is formed out of a set of ideas.

Several thinkers like Kautilya, Machiavelli, Joseph Nye, Aristotle, Kant, Marx, etc. gave their version of the use of Power. It is said that every thinker is the child of his time. It is true if we consider the nature of the idea. Every idea and ideology is challenged in the due course of time. Every thinker had designed his model as per his ideas. As we discussed earlier, the ideas may have several connotations and a set of complementary ideas forms an ideology. Let's see this. The set of ideas which vouch for upholding universal morality and rationality is

called deontology. The one which believes in what works rather than what ought to be and is based on ends rather than means is called pragmatism or teleology. There are various forms of power but all of them have their origin from basic ideas.

We all have heard the famous saying “One cannot stop an idea whose time has come.” There are several debates about whether we should strive for what ought to be and try to make it a reality or work on what is and recalibrate according to it. What people often ignore is that the former is the best form while the latter is the best practicable form. “What ought to be” gives us the vision, motivation and direction to work for the best while “what is” paves the way to achieve the objectives of that vision in the current context. The former can be said strategic while the latter is tactical. A balance of both is necessary to move a step further towards our vision and to also ensure that we do not lose touch with reality. Nature is a double-edged sword. At times it is benevolent and at times it is ferocious. Hence, it becomes important to handle this sword effectively and try to square off our national interests along with our vision. This can also be understood with the help of Aristotle’s principle of “The Golden Mean” or Buddha’s principle of “The Middle Path.” It suggests that the mean or average of any trait or behaviour produces the best outcomes.

In most cases, the power is delegated to an entity whose ideas are the result of the basic common denominator of collective wisdom in that instant. Now let us understand this, currently, there is an upsurge of right-wing ideology and nationalistic tendencies in the world. This is not merely because of the political will of the parties but because of the shifting of the basic common denominator from left-liberal ideology and universal humanism to right-wing nationalistic ideology in several countries.

Currently, democracy is the best model of governance as it provides the flexibility to citizens to delegate powers to the parties whose ideas they like. It also provides an opportunity to remove the government from power if its ideas are not consistent with the basic common denominator which is dynamic. What makes democracy the best working political model is the system of checks and balances. The concept of discussion, deliberations, consensus, and inclusivity is not novel, especially in Bharat which had Institutions like Sabha and Samiti even in the ancient era. The reason why it works is because it keeps a check on ideas, ideologies, and power. Socrates devised a method on similar lines and called it a dialectic method. He said that a thesis when met with antithesis results in the synthesis of something of greater significance. It is a method of questioning everything, brainstorming things and reaching a conclusion. It

keeps a check on ideas and ensures that nothing is left unscrutinised or is not arbitrary. These concepts form a model of what we call today as a democracy. Democracy creates checks and balances at each level whether it may be a simple idea (Eg- Deliberation on a Bill or a Policy), whether it be an ideology (Capitalism is countered and balanced by Communism / Socialism) or whether it be the power (the Judiciary can declare an act as void if it infringes fundamental rights). At its core the ability to adapt with time and to confer power with ease, to those whose ideas seem relevant. The flexibility that it provides makes it the current best system.

One good question might be why there are reports that democracies are on a decline and why it is said that democracies are under great threat. Let's keep aside the fact that such arguments are debatable and might be a part of the narrative of left-liberals. Let's try to analyze it considering the recent degradation or collapse of democratic systems in some countries. The main aspects behind most of the collapse were corruption, inequalities, poverty, and hunger. At the root, the idea is of survival. The state that fails to create adequate conditions for the survival of its citizens is more susceptible to a political and economic collapse. The primary instinct of humans is survival. Then there can be other factors like dominance, hegemony, soft power or any other philosophical ideas. Most of the democracies which collapse are not truly democratic and have a highly flawed system of governance. Their collapse is the combination of extreme poverty and inequality, corruption, and authoritarian tendencies. If we carefully observe then we can see that the main reason is poverty and extreme inequality. This indicates that the core concern for any human is survival. A person cannot think about rationality with an empty stomach. China being an autocratic regime is still internally stable because it has managed to uplift a large section of people from poverty and hunger. Although we can't discount the internal stability because of Chinese suppression but still the economic rise and elimination of poverty can be given a large chunk of credit. It is not a surprise that no person in China would like to face the wrath of the Chinese government by protesting even when his core concerns are being addressed. In cases of flawed democracies, the inequalities are at their peak and economic systems are highly exploitative. The government often ignore the core concern of a human. The state is an individual writ large and hence at times when the core concern of the masses is ignored, it leads to the collapse of the state. Hence, it becomes a major reason for their collapse.

The idea, ideology and power need to be checked at every level. It's not always important to maintain an equal balance between them. Sometimes it is also necessary for them to flow freely as they represent the basic minimum common

denominator of the masses. But one thing is sure that the necessary conditions must be created to ensure a level-playing field. Any idea, ideology and power must not be left uncontested as it creates a scope of triggering authoritarian tendencies. Just as capitalism took aspects of public welfare from socialism and amended some of its terms, the ideas, ideologies and powers when countered by other ideas, ideologies and powers lead to the greater good. Their variance with respect to time and space and their interrelation with each other is what makes them nuanced but significant at the same time. Indeed, the synthesis created by the combination of thesis and anti-thesis promises a better world.