

Burden of a Nobel Laureate

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In 1919, following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Rabindranath Tagore, the first Asian Noble laureate, renounced his knighthood and wrote to Viceroy Lord Chelmsford by concluding that, “when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation and I for my part, wish to stand, shorn, by the side of my countrymen who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings. And these are the reasons which have compelled me to ask Your Excellency, with due reference and regret, to relieve me of my title of knighthood, whose burden I no longer can carry”. Although he did not agree with all the political activities and nationalistic principles of the movements for independence, humiliation of his fellow citizens shook his conscience so much that it did not allow him to carry the burden of the laurel of knighthood.

It was Friday, October the 13th (I was driving extra carefully!), 7:30 am Toronto local time, I was bound for work, when the announcement was made in my car radio that Dr. Mohammad Yunus and the Grameen bank of Bangladesh, which he founded, have won the Nobel Peace Prize. The news was not at all surprising, but extremely joyous for the fact that the moment has at last come for which millions of his own compatriots and admirers (of his methodology and philosophy) around the globe have been waiting for years. I could not resist breaking the news to my students, no matter how irrelevant it was to the engineering course that I was teaching. My personal perception of Dr. Yunus’s contributions and doctrines fell into three categories: firstly, I was a great admirer of his patriotic zeal during our great war of liberation while he was a student of Vanderbilt University of Tennessee. In fact, several years ago, in the face of the ceaseless efforts to distort and expunge our glorious history, I wrote an article entitled, “our glorious history”, in which I eulogized the contributions of two of our illustrious sons, late Dr. F R Khan (we incidentally attended the same University for the highest degree), and Dr. Mohammad Yunus. Secondly, I am a great admirer of his micro-credit theory without understanding its detailed intricacies, the bottom line of which is to benefit our timing millions, the ‘poorest of the poor’. In the third category, I was critical of his lecture which he delivered in a seminar entitled, ‘If I could be the chairman of the Anti-corruption commission’. To me, the idea was absolutely utopian in our current state of affairs of the State, which I elaborated in an open letter published in a News Daily. I dreaded the worst if he would still go ahead to materialize his plan and persist with his hypothetical mission to investigate the corruption of the rich and powerful and concluded with the heartfelt supplication, “for Heaven’s sake, we do not want that dreadful tragedy to happen, Professor Yunus. “

In the will and testament drawn up by Alfred Bernhard Nobel on November 27, 1895, he laid down the conditions to be fulfilled by a recipient of the Nobel Prize. Paragraph One states, *inter alia*, that the award of the prize shall be made to the person who, during the preceding year, "shall have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind". The peace prize bears extra significance for the fact that this should be awarded "to the person who shall

have done the most or best work for fraternity among nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses. "

The multi-dimensional aspect of peace has propelled the Nobel committee to extend its periphery to recognize the contributions that may not be directly entangled to what Alfred Nobel's will had envisioned. Dr. Norman Borlaug, an agricultural scientist, was awarded the peace prize in 1970 by redefining the 'benefit to humanity' who helped, borrowing from the banner of Bolshevik revolution, 'bread and peace', to provide bread for a hungry world.

Dr. Shirin Ebadi of Iran was awarded in 2003 for her efforts for democracy and human rights. The Nobel committee hoped that the Prize would be an inspiration for all those who struggle for human rights and democracy in her country.

Dr. Wangari Muta Maathai of Kenya was awarded in 2003 for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace. The Nobel citation further stressed that, "Maathai stood up courageously against the former oppressive regime in Kenya. Her unique forms of action have contributed to drawing attention to political oppression - nationally and internationally." Likewise the Nobel Committee's citation for Dr Yunus, underscored efforts of Dr Yunus and Grameen Bank to create economic and social development from below and in its own words, "development from below also serves to advance democracy and human rights."

It is obvious that no matter how the 'benefit on mankind' is interpreted, efforts to advance human rights and democracy play an important role in the selection process. While Dr. Yunus has rightfully condemned the North Korea's nuclear drive, but his performance as a voice of conscience in his own homeland for the last several years in particular was far from reassuring. Over the last several years the battered human right situations of our dear homeland was of grave concerns for many conscious souls around the globe. Oppression of minorities and opposition workers, custodial torture and death, the brutal techniques of custodial torture of politicians and intellectuals alike and probably, the most despicable of all crimes committed by the government that has been termed by human rights organizations as 'terrorism by the State' where people are being killed on daily basis in the name of so-called 'crossfire', absolutely disregarding the rule of law. Ironically, Dr. Yunus has been totally mum on these reprehensible acts of a government that derived its authority from a constitutional process. Even the mini Jallianwala Bagh massacre of August 21, 2004 targeting the life of our former PM failed to stimulate the conscience of Dr. Yunus to express any words of concern for the dreadful act.

While Dr. Yunus has his blessings on the civil society movement to elect honest and suitable candidates, he has been totally silent when one of our brightest bureaucrat-turned politicians had been killed by assassin's grenade. It was puzzling to note the indifference of one of our most gifted sons, even before he became a Nobel laureate, vis-à-vis such a heinous crime and tragedy, who in time of the most crucial juncture of our history took only a moment to decide his course of action for the freedom of his motherland. The newly bestowed laurel has placed additional onuses on Dr. Yunus to speak for the

suffering humanity, may it be in his beloved homeland or in any part of the globe. At this time, not only his compatriots, but the whole world will be monitoring him as to the extent he can live up to the expectation of the newly crowned laurel, the core tenet of which would be to advance human rights and democracy.

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