

In search of integrity

By M. J. Audi

What is integrity? Integrity is not a commodity produced by the industrialists with twenty per cent subsidy from the government. Integrity is supreme quality of character. A character without integrity is like a pearl without lustre. Integrity means complete immunity from corruption, nepotism and favouritism and strict adherence to principles. It rejects compromises under any circumstances. Amongst all qualities of character, integrity tops the list. Hence, Kabir stressed that a society always needs persons with integrity more than it needs brave, leamed, religious and rich persons. The sages rightly rate integrity very high. On it depends good government, better society and the best culture. Unlike other qualities, integrity admits no degrees. It is either complete or nothing. Whether the persons have integrity or not can be known only by examining their actions.

Suspicion

Importance of integrity in public life is too obvious to need any elaboration. Public life, like Caesar's wife, should be above suspicion. Public life of every society everywhere in world is full of suspicions. There are many examples of the holders of the highest offices of the State telling white lies. The glaring defect of democracies is that they allow top brass in the services of State to protect themselves with the Oath of Secrecy. Secrecy always breeds corruption. Secrecy is sworn enemy of integrity. Democracies will never get good governments till they replace the Oath of Secrecy by the Oath of Integrity.

From the world scenario, one can deduct the law of integrity as accurate as Newton's law of gravitation, Law of Integrity consists of two parts. First, higher the public office, lower is the integrity of its holder. Secondly, a person without integrity in private life cannot become a leader with integrity in public life. Hence, it is a blunder to divide the life of leader into watertight compartments. Such a division has lent credence to Dr. Samuel Johnson's famous remark that public life is the

last refuge of the scoundrels. People will get good government only when their leaders are compelled to account for their deeds in private as well as public life. Now and then, we hear leaders complaining about character assassination. But, assassination of character, if one has it, is as impossible as drying of the ocean.

Qualities

A cultured society identifies eminence and prominence with integrity. The eminent and prominent citizens of the world may be known for many qualities. They are definitely not known for integrity. In our country, the smugglers, the swindlers and their lackeys are found in the front ranks of eminence and prominence. Why these worthies torture themselves with synthetic smiles is a mystery. Do they know that fake smiles reveal their real self? Behind the smile peeps a plain crook, a smart rogue or a servile sycophant. When people lack integrity, they lack sense of shame. We are told that the Indians lack sense of humour which is not true. Our sense of humour is as sharp and as strong as that of any other people. What we do lack is a sense of shame Shamelessness dominates each and every walk of our public life.

Lack of integrity of character is the root cause of sad state of nation to-day. Who is responsible for it? Where does the guilt lie? Empirical evidence puts entire blame on India's leadership. *Yatha Raja Tatha Praja* is both logical and natural. Emergence of leadership lacking integrity has been the curse of modern India. Wave after wave of colonialism tossed India but none of the colonial masters was known for integrity. The last was the worst. The deeds of Robert Clive, the founder of the British Empire and those of Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General and Elijah Impey, the first Chief Justice of India are fine samples of English integrity.

Dream

India's Freedom Movement was not a mere fight against colonialism.

Its main goal was the restoration of those values which gave ancient India the pride of place amongst the glorious cultures of the world. That was the dream of true patriots from Mangal Pande to Mohandas Gandhi? The leadership of Swaraj has betrayed these patriots. Scandal has become a salient feature of Swaraj. According to a conservative estimate, for every one scandal that appears on surface, ten remain submerged. No wonder, whenever leaders pose as Mr. or Ms. Clean, people of India greet them with derision and scorn. People reject *prima facie* existence of a leader without skeletons in the cupboard. When the skeletons roll out, the affected leader defends himself by pointing an accusing finger at others like him. Alas! Polluted public life does not become pure when pot calls kettle black. It only highlights the depth of degradation of public life. Eversince 15 August 1947, one sees in India a steady decline and disappearance of values that distinguished ancient Indians. It is shocking but true that the values which inspire modern Indians are precisely those which inspired the thugs.

Need of integrity in education is second only to the need of integrity in public life. The goal of the British educational policy was the creation of anglophiles and destruction of independent thinking which was the hall-mark of education in ancient India. Macaulay's ambition was to create a class, "Indian in blood and colour but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect". The British were remarkably successful as could be seen from pathetic performance of educated Indians.

Sheelvrata Fala Vidhya was the governing principle of education in ancient India. In modern India's temples of learning, *Sheel* is conspicuous by its absence. Experiments in education in Swaraj confirm that *No Sheel, No Vidhya* is a profound maxim. What passes as *Vidhya* in India to-day is nothing but pedanticism. Because of patronage of the powers that be, Indian education is controlled by those who are eminently qualified to rush in

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where angels fear to tread.

Like all creatures, a nation also passes through three stages of birth, growth and decay. It is free India's misfortune that she has moved from birth to decay missing growth. For this disastrous without integrity. The vitality of youthful nation has been exploited by those guiding its destiny to build private fortunes. Day by day, the grip of corruption on the administration of India becomes firmer and stronger. It is an open secret that politicians of all political parties, businessmen of all shades and their favourite bureaucrats and professionals have stacked their ill-gotten wealth into the secret accounts of the Swiss banks. No wonder, despite forty years of freedom, eighty per cent of people of India are living miserable and wretched life.