

PLEASURE IS ALL MINE

Suu Kyi's power of powerlessness



SHAH HUSAIN IMAM

THIS is the second coming of Aung San Suu Kyi to democracy, the first one having been ruthlessly denied her in 1990 when her landslide victory in polls was rejected out of hand by an usurping inveterate army junta.

Her resurrection from the depths of an abyss of 22-year long house arrest is a remarkable tale of endurance, forbearance and, above all, a quiet personal demeanour and style that gave no offence to even implacable enemies.

Even after long captivity during the prime years of her life she bears no grudge against her captors Myanmar army leaders who kept Myanmar people bonded in a master-slave relationship. But when it came to principles she would not buckle under pressure to barter these for personal freedom or a self-exiled life away from her people. She stuck it out with her people staunchly defending their rights from the quietude of a mendicant's life. She endured all intimidating circumstances preferring life in seclusion to one of crass compromise.

Small wonder, Suu Kyi is beginning to be seen as Myanmar's Mandela; she is also said to have something of Mahatma Gandhi in her, given her non-violent persona.

Nelson Mandela served 27 years in jail to Suu Kyi's 22 years. The South African icon never harboured ill-will or rancour towards his tormentor, like Suu Kyi in her dealings with her captors. Both of them believed that magnanimity is humanity. In fact, Mandela had sent roses from the garden he was tending as a prisoner in Robben Island as a gift to de Klerk's daughter on her birthday. A gesture whose effect could not have been lost on the half-boiled apartheid leader.

By virtue of the Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) winning 43 out of the 45 seats in the by-elections, she takes public office for the first time and leads a small bloc of lawmakers in 664-member



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Myanmar parliament. A quarter of the parliamentary seats belong to the military while the rest to the military-backed ruling Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). The military's presence is felt beyond the government and the parliament as they have swapped military uniforms for civilian suits presiding over many state institutions.

The hard work begins now for Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein. She trusts Thein Sein and keeps faith in his "genuine wishes for democratic reform," but is uncertain about how much support he can draw from the army.

The military's exit to barracks is a long way off and

the gradualist rationed approach to democracy in Myanmar is clearly prompted by the army's instinct of self-preservation. A pragmatist Suu Kyi couldn't but warn her people against being triumphalist.

Like Mandela, Suu Kyi is for reconciliation between major political forces. Mandela's task was to get Afrikaner and South African people to reconcile to each other under an olive branch of magnanimity in contrast to state of affairs in Mugabe's Zimbabwe. The agendas close to Suu Kyi's heart and which she never tires of emphasizing are reconciliation between several political parties to present a united front and that between a

large number of ethnic groups. Many political prisoners are still languishing in jail and there is considerable press censorship in existence.

Suu Kyi's celebrity status as "one of the world's most prominent prisoners of conscience" and Nobel Laureate for Peace could have only been enhanced by her entry into electoral politics and the stupendous rapport with the people she has built up during her election campaign. This is an asset worthy of utilisation to a maximum effect by the Myanmar establishment for Myanmar's taking her place with the wider open world.

In Bangladesh, we are expecting a relaxed relationship with Myanmar, even one of partnership in progress, now that the maritime dispute has been arbitrated to the mutual advantage of both countries.

Myanmar is opening up. It is in business irreversibly, the trend based on a realisation among its leadership that their country can no longer lie low before the rest of the skyscraper Asia. And why must it be? When the country is rich in gas, oil, mineral resources, teak and gems? Tourist arrivals rose by 20 percent in 2011 following 2010 elections and how much more would be the leapfrogging if the country goes to truly democratic polls in 2015.

She is no stranger to adversities of life from the very word go. She was two-years old when her father Gen. Aung San, a national hero was assassinated along with six members of interim government by his rivals in 1947. Educated in New Delhi where her mother Daw Khin Kyi had served as Burmese ambassador, she went off to Britain to study in Oxford. In 1972, she married Michael Aris, an Oxford academic. In captivity she lost both her mother and husband. Her only son Alexander survives.

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Autism and mental health

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MENTAL health issues such as anxiety, depression in children are under-diagnosed all over the world. What if the child has autism, but can't express himself properly? The chance of diagnosing this morbidity is very slim.

Why would they develop these problems? Do they have emotions like others? Yes, they have emotions like any other person. Not only simple emotions such as happiness and sadness, but also complex emotions like guilt. It was established recently by Professor Francesca Happé that people with autism, besides recognising their own emotions, can also recognise emotions of others. These special people, although they don't make appropriate eye contact, can read others' tones, gestures and facial expressions.

Dr. Wendy Lawson, a renowned Australian psychologist who herself has autism, said that it is impossible to fool people with autism. However, we usually make comments about autistic people in front of them without thinking that the comments might be harmful because they can recognise our emotions through our voice and gestures. Many of them can also understand simple phrases.

Imagine yourself in the same situation, you have problems in expressing yourself, but you can understand that you are always scrutinised and/or criticised by people around you. Ultimately, you would develop low self-esteem, anxiety, depression and other mental health problems. This is the situation for persons with autism.

Any behaviour that is different from what others expect is labeled as problematic. Therefore, signs of anxiety or depression are often not recognised among them. These symptoms are dealt with in the way that others want to deal with them; they are always asked to get over any difficulties, no matter how hard it is for them. They are often told that they are the only ones to develop this fear, so they should get over it as soon as they can.

According to research findings, 30-35% children with autism, after getting early intervention, can integrate with typically developing peer group with or without support. Bringing a child to this level needs relentless work by the family and the special schools or centres providing intervention to these children. When the child is ready to go with his typically developing peer group, he goes to the mainstream setup with the diagnosis of autism.

Anything different from his peer group is labeled as problematic, and parents often receive complaints about the different behaviour of their children. The child can feel that what he is doing is not accepted by others. Moreover, there is a chance of being bullied by his peer group as children are often very good at picking up on the differences in their friends. As a result the child may develop associated social anxiety.

People with social anxiety are fearful of social situations, they do not have enough confidence to get into a social situation. What happens when a child with autism develops social anxiety? He will not get into a group. How will we deal with these situations as caregivers? Is it autism or autism with social anxiety?

It does not matter whether the child does or doesn't have this associated anxiety, we should support him in socialising with his peer group gradually. The common myth is, only because the child has autism, he will not benefit from this socialisation.

This is a real challenge faced by these special children who are developing mental health problems due to lack of proper integration. Many children who only had one diagnosis while leaving their special setups can later develop dual problems like autism with social anxiety and/or depression. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a big spectrum, and children who are on the edge can often survive independently if they get proper support at an early stage. But the associated anxiety can hold them back from integrating independently into the society.

What can we do as care givers? Normalisation can give some relief to these fears. Rather than labeling these children as "different," we can give them the idea that it is normal to get fearful at times. It can be done through stories and pictures too. We can also teach them to rate their emotions on a scale, be it happiness, sadness or anger. Of course, this should be introduced when the child is calm.

The physical feelings of anxiety can be described to them through pictures as well. They can be taught about their negative and positive thoughts through simple games. I often give the example of Mr. Worry and Mr. Norry, sometimes with the help of pictures, where Mr. Worry (bad thoughts) is presented as a character that the child obviously dislikes and Mr. Norry (good thoughts) is drawn as a favourite character of the child. Then the child is taught how he can defeat Mr. Worry with Mr. Norry's help. This often helps to teach the child that his thoughts and emotions are under her/his own control and her/his thoughts

don't control him. They can be encouraged to play with others about what they can do in fearful situations. Then parents and teachers can help them to get the exposure in peer groups in a gradual way, which will sensitise them over time. Mainstream schools can also educate the typically developing peer group about how to behave with their special friend. Schools can play an important role in desensitisation. Schools and parents, rather than teaching the child to hide or get over her/his emotions, can encourage her/him to express her/his thoughts and emotions. Instead of assuming what is happening in her/his mind, we can actually ask them what situations are difficult for her/him and why. These open discussions about feelings and thoughts can minimise the fears a lot. Regular rating of her/his emotions can reflect her/his improvement and help to build up her/his confidence.

Awareness about autism also means the society's responsibility to give these children the opportunity to grow up with other children in an accepting environment. We all have a responsibility towards lighting up the small hearts of these younger special citizens.

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What the cross of Christ means

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TODAY is Good Friday. Christians all over the world observe this day when Jesus Christ made his supreme sacrifice on the cross by giving his sinless life for the salvation of mankind from the curse of sin. The God-ordained sacrificial death of Christ lies at the centre of Christian faith. Why should the Son of God have to die for human salvation?

The Jews looked for signs from Jesus as to his divinity; and the wisdom seeking Greeks found Jesus' death on the cross as folly. So the idea of a "crucified saviour" has always been and will be a contradiction in terms. Christian thinker Dr. D.A. Carson wrote: "The thought of a 'Crucified God' is a contradiction in terms, like frozen steam or hateful love or upward decline or a godly rapist only for more shocking." Bible commentator F.F. Bruce said: "Over and above the disgrace of crucifixion, how could anyone accept as lord and delivers a man who had not sufficient wit to save himself from so ghastly a death, or look to such a man as an exponent of wisdom?"

In Christ's suffering and death God showed his unfolding love for mankind, who fell short of his standard because of sin. Christ fulfilled the demand of the holiness and justice of God in his death. John testified in his epistle: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers" (1 John 3:16). Prophet Isaiah sang of the Christ, the Suffering Servant of God: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53).

The Mosaic Law for Levitical sacrifice in the Old Testament had it that animals were to be without any blemish in order to be sacrificed. Jesus, being born of the Virgin Mary, the sinless Son of God fulfilled that condition and as such he bore the punishment that was due for man. Paul, the greatest interpreter of the Christ event said: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

As we seek to meditate on the death of Christ we are commissioned to love God and his creation, people and nature. We must seek to do justice to others and respect the rights of others. We are not only to believe in Christ, but also to follow his footsteps and serve others in humility and love. Christ is our supreme example and the greatest teacher in this. We cannot avoid our responsibilities to other

people in need. The very fact of Christ's incarnation and unjust sufferings for our salvation points us to a spirituality that is deeply related to our real life issues, a holistic spirituality touching every aspect of our lives material, spiritual, mental and cultural. In him the eternal divine Word became flesh and dwelt among us and gave a new and dignifying meaning of human life as created in the image and likeness of God. We are challenged to bear our own crosses which we do for serving others in humility and selfless love and compassion.

Jesus saw extremes of religious rituals, but spiritual bankruptcy characterised by vested interests and abuse of authority and leadership. All that he taught and did were so disturbing the status quo and the vested interests of the establishment that they had no other way than to liquidate him. They went out to protect religion and God's honour by falsehood and disrespect to people. Man did what man could do. But God had a different plan! His ways are different to that of man's!

We must not forget the greatest sequel to the death of Christ: his resurrection from death in a

transformed body. God raised his Son from the dead. He vindicated him, who was innocent and yet killed by unrighteous men, that he is God's Son and Author of life. The resurrection of Christ ought to transform our mindset and attitude to life.

This is how he conquered death, the wage of sin. This is how Christ is

the Master and Lord of the believer. This is how he is the first fruit of the new creation promising us to be a new humanity. Believers have been purchased by the innocent blood of Christ to be people who would strive to live in justice and peace. This new life is to be lived in faith and trust in his transforming power of God. But it is no easy thing in our world!

The incarnation of Jesus had in view both his cross and the resurrection. God vindicated his Son in the resurrection. We need to be ready for bearing our own crosses. In resurrection Christ has destroyed the power of sin and death. In our temporal life sin operates in our greed, pride and jealousy by holding our thoughts, desires, hopes and our total life in its grip. Christ made his supreme sacrifice that, believing in him, we might be free and get reconciled to God and to others. The more we internalise the message of the cross and resurrection of Christ the more we become truly human, authentic believers, and true to ourselves as God's crown of creation.

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