The Universal Folly

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Being in a state of denial is a universal human folly that has lead to unimaginable destruction. Yet nothing seems to deter people from making this mistake over and over again for the simple reason that we just don't want to face the truth – it's too harsh, too humiliating, too much to swallow.

Governments all over the world are always in this state as they wish to manipulate the people they rule and make them think that they are being governed by the best possible ruler. Superpowers especially, have taken denial to unimaginable heights. They will deny that they have grossly violated human rights by annihilating thousands of people in a foreign land on the pretext of 'safeguarding the world' (read their own citizens) because they believe there are terrorists or imaginary weapons of mass destruction. Yet they will pounce upon a less powerful country at the drop of a hat, accuse it of human rights violations and bring it to its knees until it yields. As for trying to control a country through their financial institutions, intelligence agencies and threats of economic boycott? They will totally deny it.

In the case of our own leaders, whether they are in government or anti-government, the state of denial is their biggest political weapon. The government may completely dismiss the endemic corruption of its officials, its incompetence in handling national crises and the fact that the majority of the population are suffering due to lack of basic facilities – food, health, education, shelter and security. Opposition leaders meanwhile, have a field day pointing out all these things but conveniently denying their own role in destabilizing the country and pushing people further into the abyss of despair.

Why such large-scale denial — is really not such a mystery. On an individual level, every person is in a state of denial.

Aging, for instance, increases this propensity quite significantly. How many of us really want to admit to ourselves, let alone others, that we are getting old. Hence all those attempts to hide the fact – hair-dyeing, extra dollops of make up, loud coloured clothing, 'age-defying' moisturising, cosmetic tampering, the using expressions that sound 'young and cool' and marrying partners who are embarrassingly young.

Teenagers are in a state of continuous denial regarding their lack of discipline, their irrational rebellion against authority, their bad dress sense and the fact that they are still not grown ups.

For diplomats, PR people and advertising agents, denial is part of their job requirement. Have you ever heard an ambassador say "I am appalled at the stand my government has taken, you should just tell them to go to hell". Have you ever seen an ad that says: "This product is full of preservatives and artificial colouring. It is practically 100 percent synthetic, but please do buy it anyway."

Parents in particular suffer from this state as they believe that they know what's best for their offspring. Thus a potential musician will be pushed into medical school and a tone deaf, mathematical whiz will be coaxed into bringing out an album of Adhunik Gaan (modern songs). Parents who obnoxiously praise their child to the point of sickness are in denial that their little angel has, on the sly, painted the town red with all sorts of delinquent behaviour.

But what about babies? Are they ever in a state of denial? They are, after all, quite frank about when they want to be fed, entertained and 'lullabyed' to sleep. They scream when they don't like someone's looks and gurgle when they do. This is probably the only time they are untouched by the bug of denial. Give them a few months though and they will have wizened to the ways of the world. Think of two-year olds who throw mind-boggling tantrums because apparently they were not given candy when they wanted it. The real reason is that they are cranky from exhaustion, a little jealous that the parent cuddled another's child and just want a good snuggle before calling it a night. But they kick and screech for hours as if in extreme physical pain. They are definitely in a state of denial. ■