

ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS IN PUBLIC LIFE

Prof. P. G. Mavalankar



FORUM OF FREE ENTERPRISE

PIRAMAL MANSION, 235 DR. D. N. ROAD,

BOMBAY 400 001.

"Free Enterprise was born with man and
shall survive as long as man survives."

—A. D. Shroff

1899-1965

Founder-President
Forum of Free Enterprise

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by

Prof. P. G. Mavalankar

A. D. Shroff was a rare individual and vigorous crusader. He was very eminent in the fields of economic, business and industry. A. D. Shroff was a person with clarity of thought, intelligence, hard work, dedication and vision. This was so clearly illustrated in fact when he was picked up by Subhash Chandra Bose in 1938, when the National Planning Committee was formed with Jawaharlalji as Chairman, Prof. K. T. Shah, as Secretary, as one of its members and later on he was associated with the Bombay Plan. He was a man who had vision of tomorrow and an understanding of the past and awareness of the problems and difficulties of the present. Men like A. D. Shroff are needed more in various walks of life. One may not agree with such individuals. He held his views firmly and expressed them frankly. Can we say that about many individuals, that they hold their views firmly and express them frankly? Somehow, they hold views firmly until more firm authority wants them to express those views weakly. This is true not only of economic and business world, but much more so of public life.

The Forum of Free Enterprise was founded in 1956 by A. D. Shroff and he rightly said: "Free Enterprise was born with man and will survive as long as man survives". It requires guts to say this and it required guts to say that when he said it. It required guts to stand up and swim against

* This is the text of the 14th A. D. Shroff Memorial Lecture delivered under the auspices of the Forum of Free Enterprise in Bombay on 30th October 1979. The author is the Founder-Director of Harold Laski Institute of Political Science, Ahmedabad, and a former Independent Member of Parliament.

the current and not just to survive. Those who swim against the current, and know that they swim against the current with purpose, never sink. In the ultimate analysis, individuals who stand up and show courage to swim against the current, do shine out not in terms of their individual ego, which goes on melting as they proceed further, but in terms of the ideal and purpose for which they stand and the convictions they hold dearly. Their ideas get planted deeper and wider into the body politics.

Public life is far vaster, greater, larger and broader than political life. The tragedy in today's India is that public life is equated with political life. I am very happy that public life is to some extent not yet as polluted as the political life has been. In fact, if we take public life and political life as one and the same, then there is no public life in India!

The Forum of Free Enterprise which A. D. Shroff founded is a non-political organisation. It is not partisan. The Forum has been doing excellent work in creating public opinion which is informed and educated, intelligent and intelligible. I want to congratulate this Forum for taking these activities. There cannot be a more fitting memorial to late A. D. Shroff in carrying out his desired objectives of free expression of frank views.

The theme of my lecture is of perennial interest in a democratic republic but it is much more topical in today's perplexing atmosphere. Indeed, the theme is also full of anxiety and concern for all who want to see that the newly won democratic freedoms are not lost again. In all countries of the world today because of technological and other factors the impact of politics on other areas of life has been increasing at a very fast rate. Therefore, the preservation of democratic freedoms is very essential. There is a perplexing atmosphere in the country today. Intellectuals must see to it that a sense of direction, which has been lost sight of by the people at large, should be restored to them by the work and creative role that the intellectuals play and ought to play in India of today and tomorrow. Public life in a democracy is all the more creative and crucial. In fact, where there is

no democracy, there is no public life. It is only in democracy that the public or the public spirit are valued, respected, honoured, recognised. It is only in democracy that public spirit is affirmed, whereas in dictatorship it is suppressed. Centuries ago, a famous Greek, Pericles, said: "We must regard a man who takes no part in public affairs not as a harmless but as a useless character". Abraham Lincoln said: "To sin by silence, when they should protest, makes cowards of men". This is not the role of intellectuals; either to become a coward himself or to make others cowards.

There are three key words in the title of my lecture, Intellectual, Public life and the Role of intellectuals. These terms as in the case of other terms like democracy, freedom, right, liberty, equality, justice, fair play etc. are much abused and misused. For instance, people who do not believe in democracy at all shout loudest for democracy. Therefore, we must be very very cautious about the use of these terms because there is lot of loose talk and confusion which should be avoided. Intellectual has become a fashionable word in modern times. Magazines, books, periodicals, articles and public lectures frequently refer to intellectuals. Either they damn or praise them. The fact remains that intellectuals in any society are few. In our own country, they are fewer. If any one wanted evidence to find out whether there were intellectuals in this country, one should only analyse what happened during the years 1975 to 1977. In fact, non-intellectual commoners were more creative and brave than intellectuals who can be called pseudo-intellectuals or fake intellectuals. The question is who is an intellectual. An intellectual is one who is

Intelligent but not clever
Sensible but not smart
Wise but not wilful
Witty but not wicked
Sane but not sullen and surely not swollen
Sarcastic, but not satirical
Idealist but not romanticist
Artist but not artisan

A very interesting description of intellectuals was given by no less a leader than Mao Tse-Tung. He described intellectuals as "swollen in head, weak in legs, sharp in tongue but empty in belly".

An intellectual is a rare commodity, as John Stuart Mill said in his book on "Liberty": they survive because of an atmosphere of freedom and they thrive because of a climate of liberty but they do not thrive in large numbers. If there are many intellectuals, we should begin to feel nervous! True intellectuals should be distinguished from the intelligentsia because in their spheres of work and influence there are significant differences. Intelligentsia, we must have in a good measure. Intellectuals few and far between are adequate.

An intellectual is one who lives in intelligence and does not live on intelligence. He uses his intellect creatively, critically and constructively; he has courage of his convictions; he is not too sure of his views and opinions. The problem in democracy is that most of the leaders are very sure of what they say. In fact, some of them have the mannerism of saying, "I have no doubt". In a democracy, we must have leaders, who will say, "I said this firmly but I am not too sure whether I am right in saying this firmly". That means there is some sense of tolerance and understanding of other man's point of view.

While an intellectual should not be too sure of his views and opinions, he should have the stamp of clarity, certainty, confidence and charity in all his intellectual bearings and moorings. He is one who is open and receptive and is, therefore, growing all the time. An intellectual, besides being intelligent, has four very essential qualities. Otherwise, he is likely to use his intelligence in a perverted way. These four qualities are, imagination, integrity, independence and incorruptibility. It is very difficult to find such individuals. If they are incorruptible, perhaps they are not independent. If they are incorruptible and independent, they are not having imagination. If they are having imagination, they may have no integrity. It is rare to have a combination of

all these four qualities. Further, an intellectual should possess in good measure vision, compassion, understanding and humanism. He is not dogmatic and does not have a doctrinaire attitude; he takes a balanced view of things, and a pragmatic approach to matters and problems of life. He is single-minded in his devotion to public issues; he is ever-vigilant, an active crusader with a variety of causes including the championing of lost causes. One of them, for instance, is the abolition of capital punishment. There are many such causes for which people fight inside and outside Parliament; on the public platform; through newspapers, radio, and other mass media. An intellectual will not bother whether or not he gets immediate success. As a matter of fact, an intellectual never gets instant success. Unfortunately, in the world today everything must be instant. However, an intellectual knows that things have to blossom. Certain things have to happen in the natural course of time and events.

An intellectual is a live-wire with self-charged battery, striving and struggling for a change in the midst of continuity and stability. Of course, sometimes, intellectuals are described as 'eggheads'. Governor Adlai Stevenson lost his fight for presidential elections in U.S.A. twice. However, he promoted causes for which intellectuals should stand or ought to stand. Governor Adlai Stevenson was described by many politicians of America in those days as an 'egghead'. He once said at the meeting in one University: "If by egghead is meant all educated people, I am glad today at least I am in the company of eggheads". He mentioned also how sometimes intellectuals or so-called intellectuals can go wrong. Someone mentioned that if intellectuals are called "eggheads", then there is a further sub-division called "scrambled eggheads". It means a confused lot. Although they know a lot, they do not know what they know. It is better to have a man who knows less but knows that he knows less instead of having a man who knows a lot but in the end does not know what he knows. The other sub-division of eggheads is hardboiled eggheads meaning thereby a more tough minded type. Almost those people who

are too sure of themselves, not easily amenable to reason or arguments, because they are always right. Because they are always right, they feel that others are necessarily always wrong. If they are leaders, they are right and people are wrong! An intellectual must never give in or give up, come what may. On matters on which he stands on firm grounds in conformity with eternal values of truth and justice, he should be firm. If need be, he must be prepared to go alone. The great poet Gurudev Rabindranath sang, "go alone". The trouble is that when one is going alone, one thinks that he is heading his followers, but before he knows that they are all gone. If an intellectual is alone, surely on the right path, then such a man is never alone, because he never bothers to see behind who is following him. The world is following him. Socrates never looked behind. Abraham Lincoln never looked behind. Mahatma Gandhi never looked behind but for time immemorial he will live. As Einsten put it, Generations from now on would scarcely believe that such a man with flesh and blood ever tread on this mother earth. Gandhiji belonged to eternity; yet in many senses, he was a lone individual. If some intellectuals describe Gandhiji as non-intellectual, those intellectuals themselves are non-intellectuals, because Gandhi was one of the greatest intellectuals. Socrates was one of the greatest intellectuals. They did not write many books. Gandhiji was once asked by Julian Huxley to contribute an article on "human rights". Gandhiji wrote in reply a small letter, while he was on the running train, a deeply depressed man seeing the sorry spectacle of India divided and her people madly killing each other in thousands. With deep agony in his heart but clarity in his thoughts and purity in his heart, Gandhi wrote: What kind of article I can write for you? I am not an intellectual — (he said I am not a Pundit). I cannot write an essay on 'human rights'. "I learnt from my illiterate but wise mother that all rights to be deserved and preserved came from duty well done." I have yet to come across a better and more meaningful definition of inevitable togetherness or inseparableness of rights and duties. How beautifully he described in such simple and short words ! An intellectual should possess daring to do the right thing even when left

alone on a forsaken island. If he is a Robinson Crusoe, he would still go ahead with these ideas because, he, though alone by himself, still has tools and equipment of a well-cultivated mind and body and he should be able to sustain himself with enough strength and spiritual force.

Public life is something more than mere discussion on public platforms on issues, problems and challenges the people are confronted with. Public life is, in that sense, also vaster and larger because it contains many projections of ideals and values for which mankind has struggled so far. So, public life is a concept in itself. It is, of course, a reality. This concept of public life was available in ancient Greece as also in ancient India. In ancient Greece, there was a monarchy of Chieftanship. It was always tampered by public opinion which found expression in the public assembly. In Socratic times, public assembly was a street corner meeting. Socrates used to have a dialogue or converse with any one whom he came across in the street of the citystate of Athens. That was Socrates' contribution to the development of public life. So was it in ancient India.

In India, even in pre-Buddhist times, there did exist several republics apart from kingdoms and monarchies. Equality of all rights, rejection of arbitrary power, appointments to offices by lot and the responsibilities of officials in common deliberations and decisions in the popular assembly were common in ancient Indian republics — *Ganatantras*, as they were called. An intellectual's contribution to public life in terms of his role is not merely to enunciate but also, whenever necessary, to participate in it. If he stops at enunciation and does not participate in the affairs of the community, then his role as an intellectual is inadequate, incomplete and often misleading. He has not tested his ideas through practice. Gandhiji was a great man because he was experimental: an intellectual, therefore, is experimental. He experiments his ideas through his own conduct, tests them, hypothesises, verifies them, removes errors, eliminates the wrongs and then gets strengthened by experience that he accumulates in the process. Socrates, unlike his disciple Plato, was eager to take part in public affairs. Plato wrote excellent books but

never took part in public affairs. Socrates had the courage to take part in public affairs and was also prepared to take the consequences. Therefore, it is better for intellectuals to take courage in their hands and participate in public affairs. When it comes to that, intellectuals should stand for elective posts, whether it is panchayat, corporation or assembly or council or parliament. Because Socrates participated in public life and Plato did not, that does not mean Plato was less of an intellectual. But it only means that Socrates was a greater intellectual, because he combined with his intellectual commitments valuable experience which the commitment needed in order to make it more fruitful, meaningful and more acceptable to times to come.

Let us analyse what is meant by public life and what is an ideal democracy. According to Lord Bryce, "An Ideal Democracy—the expression comes from Plato's remark that a pattern of the perfect State is perhaps stored up somewhere in heaven—may be taken to mean a community in which the sense of public duty and an altruistic spirit fill the minds and direct the wills of the large majority of the citizens, so that the Average Citizen stands on the level of him whom we sometimes meet and describe as the Model Citizen. What then, expressed in the terms of our own day, would such a community be? In it the average citizen will give close and constant attention to public affairs, recognizing that this is his interest as well as his duty. He will try to comprehend the main issues of policy, bringing to them an independent and impartial mind, which thinks first not of his own but of the general interest. If, owing to inevitable differences of opinion as to what are the measures needed for the general welfare, parties become inevitable, he will join one, and attend its meetings, but will repress the impulses of party spirit. Never failing to come to the polls, he will vote for his party candidate only if satisfied of his capacity and honesty. He will be ready to serve on a local Board or Council, and to be put forward as a candidate for the legislature (if satisfied of his own competence), because public service is recognised as a duty."

Gopalakrishna Gokhale, whom Gandhiji described as his Guru, repeatedly said that public life must be spiritualised.

In one of his memorable lectures in 1910, aptly titled, "Public life in India—Needs and Responsibilities", he said: "Our public life is weak, because our public spirit is weak". This is in a way message for India of today. If you want to enliven the public life, you must awaken the public spirit and the agency for awakening the public spirit is the intellectual and this is today his prime role in public in India.

The values of public life should be truth, justice, morality and humanism. The norms and standards of public behaviour and good conduct must be integrity, honesty, faithfulness and unselfishness. Many people say one thing today and do exactly the opposite tomorrow. Faithfulness is the capacity to inspire the confidence in the people that what you say and feel inside and outside are one and the same. Politicians who show one part of the mind to one section and another to another, and go on finding out which section wants which part may be successful sometimes, but they are not true intellectuals.

In India there has been a steady deterioration of public life. The role of the intellectual in public life is to remain steadfast to his intellectualism. The role of the intellectual in public life is to act as a catalyst for change. Secondly, his role in public life is to act as non-conformist critic, dogged but not rigid. One who observes the scene in his entirety, observes it objectively, analytically and what is more difficult disinterestedly and dispassionately. Large number of intellectuals write books after an event is over. But they have a certain ivory tower attitude or isolation. That creates a certain kind of despair which he must be free from. The role of the intellectual in public life in India or any other part of the democratic world is to participate in public affairs with a sense of commitment and involvement, because as an intellectual, who will have to feel and realise, he has a stake in what is happening and even in what does not happen but ought to happen. An intellectual's

role is to demolish but not to despair; to construct but not to crave. He does not, therefore, shun politics but may shun party politics. He does not necessarily share power. His rôle further is to stand for values and ideals. If compelled by conscience he should not hesitate to stand for parliament, assembly, council and corporation or for any elective post. Such a rôle, for an intellectual is always a very difficult one, occasionally even a very dangerous rôle. It is only the intellectual who can tell the people how to live dangerously. Most of us are security minded. Therefore, we do not want to take a single step without first finding out all possible consequences. Dangerous living is an important contributory factor for making public life meaningful and for enlightened public life. We have far too many security-minded people in our country. That is why we find in the last 32 years of Independence, we have intellectuals or so-called intellectuals who seem to be sharing powers with the Establishment. The rôle of the intellectual is to encourage, warn, inform and to inspire people. Therefore, the intellectual's rôle is to help create an enlightened public opinion. He must have the humility and ability to be led by commoners, although he must have also daring of not being led by fake intellectuals.

Before Independence, it seems we had a galaxy of intellectuals. These intellectuals were patriots, leaders, social reformers, educationists in their own right who would be honourable in any society or in any country of the world. But after Independence we had three periods: first formative years, then period of consolidation and then the era of construction. The last 32 years or so of Independence have shown that the educated classes, with very rare exceptions, have growing affinity with the Establishment and increasing 'Yes-manship.' No one is prepared to say "no", because saying "no" means denial of many things in life. Therefore, there is a tendency to agree with higher-ups and sometimes agree even before the higher-ups open their mouth to what they want to say. In 32 years of Independence, many of our intellectuals have become easy prey to office, comforts, security, facilities,

social prestige, recognition etc. Therefore, according to the dictum that power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely, the corrupting influence of the establishment has inevitably touched the intellectuals also.

The period of Emergency in this country was revealing in that the weakness of the intellectuals, the educated people, was poignantly revealed to the whole world. Intellectuals were not prepared to show the courage of their convictions. Thus, the pre-Emergency tensions with Emergency distortions and post-Emergency strains have combined to create an extraordinary crisis in public life in which the intellectuals are nowhere to be seen. However, I am not at all pessimistic about the future because I feel that it is in the very nature of a moderately intelligent person not to be pessimistic about life. If life offers pessimism, life also offers a greater dose of optimism. It is a question of toning up public life. As Lord Bryce pointed out the tone of public life can be "felt rather than described, being something whose presence is, like a scent, inpalpable but unmistakable. It is a quality in the atmosphere, delightful when it stimulates, depressing when it lowers intellectual or moral vitality. It is open minded, free from prejudice and intolerance, governed by the love of truth. It is also imaginative and emotional, feeling the greatness of a nation's life, gladly recognising the duty and the privilege of serving the state. It is patriotic in that sense of the word which implies that a nation ought to aim at righteousness as well as at power. Even in ambitious men it restrains the prompting of mere self-interest....."

Therefore, intellectuals can tone up public life by using freedom of thought and expression in the right way. The freedom of thought and expression are nothing but the right to think, criticise, to speak, to publish and to create. If these things can be done, then we will come to a situation where we can say that truth after all is an eternal value and goal. Seeking truth, striving for the truthful, struggling for the triumph of truth must be an intellectual's endless pursuit.

Socrates said: "Think little of Socrates and a great deal more of truth." Gandhiji said: "Truth is God and God is truth".

In fine, the intellectual's role in India of today and tomorrow is dynamic and daring, demanding devotion and dedication. The life of Jayaprakash Narayan, which was one of dynamism, daring and dedication and provided spiritual momentum and strength to public life in India, is an inspiring model for all intellectuals. He insisted on the noble and poor to be part and parcel of the public life of this country.

If Indian intellectuals follow his example, they shall not fail either the country or their own conscience.

The views expressed in this booklet are not necessarily the views of the Forum of Free Enterprise.

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of the Individual

"People must come to accept private enterprise not as a necessary evil, but as an affirmative good."

—Eugene Black

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