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The Psychology of Autocracy"-tracing the Possibility of Origin of Dictatorship in Democracy

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Abstract:

Once established and run on the basis of democratic values for a substantial time period, a sudden shift in the collective mindset of such a society resulting in the choice of dictatorship is seldom heard of. In spite of that, such societies can always take a seemingly controlled risk of making an illogical choice, in choosing a self-styled autocrat. Complacency in the face of subjugation is a dangerous trend for a society that dons the mantle of democracy. The psychology of this reaction pattern of the common mass is called "learned helplessness" resulting in "identification with the aggressor(read dictator/autocrat). The dictator is not an "avatar". He/she is just an ordinary human being like anybody else. He/she symbolizes the covert sickness of the society as a whole. It would serve the democracy better if callous and non-empathetic politicians pick up the signs of social warning and act sincerely and logically to uphold the ideals and values, that the founding fathers of "democracy" envisaged.

Keywords: Autocrat, Dictator, Learned helplessness, Survival instinct, Id.

Some things appear more memorable than others even though temporally and experientially however remote they might be from us. In the modern world of shallow smiles, busy-life and "*prosopagnosia*", some names historically linger among our taunting memories. Away from the scrutiny of public eye, in relegated solitude or many a times, beneath our conscious awareness, they evoke secret admirations.

Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Edi Ameen, Mao Zedong, Benito Mussolini, Saddam Hussein, Robert Mugabe and the likes; though they make a shorter list compared to many other venerated ones, still form a formidable one. One that is more easy to remember than forget.

In an article titled, "Bad Is Stronger Than Good," published in 2001, in 'The Review of General Psychology' the author articulates "Research over and over again shows this is a basic and wide-ranging principle of psychology." He says "It's in human nature" (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). So, is that why, the bad boys in the history of mankind make it onto an almost equal platform with the good ones, as far as human recognition and recall are concerned? This brief article;"The psychology of autocracy", attempts to answer this bemusing question.

When we observe closely the milieu in which these dictators flourished, we find that there is a common link that underlies all of their life cycles. A hopeless society that lacks in direction. There inexorably has been rampant corruption, pooling of power in few hands, political mayhem, inequality in distribution of resources, ever-widening gap between different segments of the society and utter lack of any socialistic/democratic option for a change.

Ambition appears to be the socially acceptable channelization of the basic human tendency of domination. In other words, "survival instinct" expressed in the form of human behavioural "tendency to dominate", is converted into a socially acceptable channelization in the form of "ambition", keeping in touch with the philosophy of modern civilized societies.

Like in the case of individuals, a plural society too has multiple segments that might have different collective ambitions with regard to economic social and political power. To strike a perfect regulating formula to address the needs of all the diverse segments, is a utopian dream for any government; but to bring about a consensual adjustment among the various stakeholders to fulfil at least the minimum requirements with regard to their various ambitions, should be the purpose and priority of any sensible governance.

When a so called, civilized government fails to achieve this minimum requirement due to social evils like corruption, favouritism, dynasty politics, money laundering, negligence and egotism; social protest ensues. The lack of precision in application of Cabinet form of governance has been discussed by Patrick Weller; he draws evidences from three countries; Australia, Canada and Britain, in each of which, despite the common heritage, cabinet has evolved in different ways (Weller,2003).

Any social protest divides the population into multiple groups. The first group is that which enjoys power and resources at the given point in time. The second one, which is deprived of the same, and feels trampled. Then the third one, the neutral group. Such structural dimension of stratification is explicit, according to the 'life chances hypothesis' in which it is argued that "money specialized prestigious contacts are relatively inaccessible to individuals in the lower social strata"(Pfautz,1953).

The second group (one that perceives deprivation) is usually the most ambitious and the largest one. It comprises usually of few from the lower class, almost all from the middle class and lot of the upper middle class. The empirical generalization that upward mobility is greater among the members of the middle-class, has been explained in several ways (Rogoff,1953). They usually lack much traditional background, but usually possess relevant skills that is required at the given time to thrive. Anyhow, they are usually kept in an illusion of hope. When promises get postponed and broken repeatedly and all logical means of protest or change ends, they move to the next level called "illogical choice making". When that too brings no result but despair, they resort to the dynamic step of revolution (forced restructure).

Even when the states are less repressive popular grievances are more likely to remain disarticulated and diffusely targeted. Collective protests may arise but revolutions are unlikely (Goodwin,1994). This possibly appear in many ways, akin to the case of democracies that doesn't live up to the elector's aspirations. A paradigm shift from the traditional methods of choice making seems like a valiant protest of the society just shying away from a revolution.

The third group (one that is neutral) usually comprise of the remaining upper middle class and few from the high class. They can be further divided into the "pseudo intellectuals" (the ones who blabber a lot and wish to harness fame by criticizing the famous!!!?) and the "self-actualized"(who keep a balanced view, and act logically at the hour of need).

The first group is predominantly composed of the higher class or the dynasty class (industrial empires, influential businessmen, traditionally rich landlords, political heavy weights and their generations, top religious cult leaders etc.) This group controls the majority of recourses and power. Their ambitions are more related to maintaining the power they are habituated to.

By the virtue of his personal attributes, as well as his placement at a particular time and space in a social milieu governed by the principles of normal probability(or destiny/stars as some would like to call it); a dictator/autocrat naturally connects to the emotions and ambitions of the second group. Though some of them may have a genuinely humble beginning; mostly dictators from the history have been intelligent, hippocratic, self-absorbed, cunning and over ambitious. Irrespective of the nature of their origin almost all of them have ultimately ended in utter self destruction, and also inflicted severe devastation on the society at that given point in time.

In an attempt to look trace and generalize the neuropsychiatric correlates of brain in a typical dictator, **James Fallon PhD, provides the example of** Libya's Muammar al-Gaddafi, Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Belarus's Alexander Lukashenko. He describes them as charming, charismatic, intelligent, self-confident and independent; but at the same time being paranoid, narcissistic, power-hungry, constantly attacking any opposition and almost impossible to satisfy (Fallon, 2013).

Once established and run on the basis of democratic values for a substantial time period, a sudden shift in the collective mindset of such a society, resulting in the choice of dictatorship, is seldom heard of. In spite of that, such societies can always take a seemingly controlled risk of making an illogical choice, in choosing a self-styled autocrat. The problem is that, it's a thin line that differentiates an autocrat from a dictator in a democracy, especially in the presence of a brutal majority and at the same time in the absence of effective checks and balances in the form of at least a credible opposition."When all is said, and done however, coups take place because a group of people get together and make a collective decision to overthrow a democratically elected government. The identity of this group can differ(Naidu, Robinson & Young, 2015).

The dictator is not an "avtar". He is just an ordinary human being like anybody else. He/ She may be a pan-wala, a govt babu, a politician, a commissioner of some taxes, a teacher, driver or even an alien. It's just a coincidence that, both the index of hopelessness of the society and the achievement index of the individual(definitely related to factors like age, background, skills, affiliations, placement, future-vision etc), peak at the same destined time. According to Naidu, Robinson, &Young, (2015); holding interests constant, some potential plotters, by the nature of their social networks, have much more influence over whether or not a coup succeeds.

Complacency in the face of subjugation is a dangerous trend for a society that dons the mantle of democracy. The psychology of this reaction pattern of the common mass is called "learned helplessness" resulting in "identification with an aggressor(read dictator/autocrat)". Mind you, the term "dictator" does not imply a person or a political outfit or any ideology as such. The dictator is a symptom. Overt symptom of a covertly sick society.

Every time a society meanders for a considerable time in hopelessness, it invents from itself a "saviour"; an individual or institution that seems omnipotent to cause an exorbitant transformation. The meandering society has a "collective sub-conscious". It consists of certain wishful thoughts, which if subjected to conscious thinking, would appear at that point in time, to be an unacceptable "hope against hope". This brings about disappointment, resentment and disillusionment; that ultimately tapers into hopelessness. The "Collective-Ego" of the society as a whole, loses its relevance, as all socially or intellectually accepted logics fail to establish self worth and efficacy. As and when it peaks, this collective hopelessness finds an answer, empowered by the Id(Id=survival instinct=tendency to dominate physically/otherwise=ambition) through "projective identification", leading to an illogical choice(decision) or action. It is verified that chronic stress, biases decision-making strategies, affecting the ability of stressed individuals to perform actions on the basis of their consequences (Sousa,2009).

Thwarted individual and collective ambitions in the face of egalitarian doctrines fundamental to the democratic society, precipitates hopelessness resulting in revolt (Rothbard, 1974).The society then makes a deliberate attempt to re-establish its hope through a "calculated risk taking" by choosing a person or entity which apparently symbolically appears closest to their repressed aspirations. Here a dictator is born. Irrespective of the nature/classification of the person, institution or ideology, the fact is that the dictator (the available best choice) most excellently symbolizes the hitherto suppressed seemingly unattainable wants and emotions of the society at that given point in time.

Whether we admit or not dictators or autocrats, or in a lighter vein even saviours in the attire of religious cult leaders or gimmicks of all powerful brutal destructive onscreen heroes; all hold an unusual level of capacity to attract the average human mind. The average

human mind usually falls in group two, and they are the ultimate determining force in any modern democracy. In the face of misery and hopelessness, natural rekindling of tendencies of "Id" seems to be the most recent unwritten social norm marked by self-destructive collective decision making. The phenomenon of development of a narcissistic organization of varying intensity, in self-sufficient normal people via projective identification, which heightens imaginary intrinsic omnipotence is well documented (Sohn,1984).

It would serve the democracy better if callous and non-empathetic politicians pick up the signs of social forewarning and act sincerely and logically to uphold the ideals and values, that the founding fathers of democracy envisaged. Soft revolutions occurring in some of the world's largest democracies, in the form of a paradigm shift in the psychodynamics of the nature of collective choices made by their respective societies, should be an eye opener in the direction of an impending social anarchy.

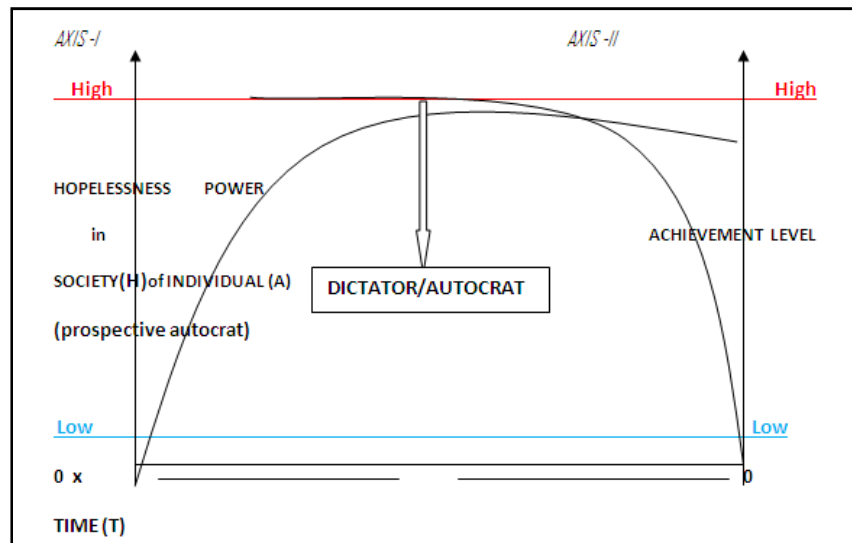


Figure 1: Depicting how personal attributes as well as his placement at a particular time and space in a social milieu, governed by the principles of normal probability facilitates a dictator/autocrat to be a natural social choice

- Graph: depicting societal and individual developmental intersection point governed by normal probability; resulting in the emergence of an autocrat/dictator.
 - Dictator: -a ruler with total power over a country, typically one who has obtained control by force.
 - Autocrat: -a leader who rules with an iron fist; in other words — someone with the behaviour of a dictator.
 - H=degree of hopelessness in the society currently under a democratic government, ranging from low to high on Axis-I
 - A=Power/ influence achievement of the individual (prospective autocrat/dictator), ranging from low to high on Axis-II
 - T=time, ranging from 0 to x, where x depicts the common intersection in time period when both H and A are the **highest**

Implication

The origin of a dictator/autocrat in an established democracy is postulated to be "Social Psychological dynamics" illustrated as a function of (H) X (A) X (T)

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