

THE SEVENTH SENSE

(By S. Jaikumar, Advocate)

"Once the game is over, both the king and the pawn go to the same box!"

- Anonymous

But, before getting into the box, in this brief journey between the womb and the tomb, the tamasha created by every one carrying a halo called EGO, is really comical and cosmical! Almost everyone of us, religiously carry this halo and the only thing that varies is the radius of the halo, between the king and the pawn!

Mr. Ego is so omnipresent that, we encounter him anywhere and everywhere, in anyone and everyone! Behind every marred marriage, collapsed corporate, parted politics or wretched warfare, we could always identify Mr. Ego's strong presence, in all walks of life! Right from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ to the fall of Caesar's Roman Empire, from the genocide of Adolph Hitler to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, from the declaration of Emergency to the divorces of Elizabeth Taylor, from the split in the reliable business empire of India to the arrest in the Kanchi Mutt, Mr. Ego was there, everywhere!

To me, ego is basically a quest for prominence, which ultimately culminates into a fist of dominance! There is a prevalent proverb in my vernacular that, "You don't crave for a silk shirt, when you starve for a meal!" Similarly, when your very existence is at stake, you can't afford to have the luxury of ego! But once your existence is guaranteed, automatically one's search for the prominence starts! Once the scent of prominence is smelt, no one wants to shred that fragrance and go all out to retain it. In the process of retaining the prominence, often one becomes a dominator, with his ego being inflated to XXXL size!

In my limited experience, I have come across few specimens of such inflated egos, who have caused an experience of my life! When I was working in a Range office, after the Budget, there was a Budget analysis meeting at the Divisional office, before the Assistant Commissioner. As my Superintendent was on urgent leave, he deputed me to attend the meeting on behalf of our Range. That year, the Modvat credit of the duty paid was extended to the capital goods. During the meeting, the Assistant Commissioner was elaborating about the scheme. He was observing that the Modvat credit shall be allowed on capital goods ONLY if the manufacturer did not depreciate the entire value of the machinery under Income Tax. He also went on to dictate a Circular to that extent. As I felt otherwise, I requested permission to intervene and said that, it appears that only the duty portion of which credit is sought to be availed shall not be depreciated and not the entire value. I thought I will be appreciated or at least the point will be debated. But, to my surprise, the Assistant Commissioner turned red and roared, "Who the hell are you? Who allowed you to get inside this meeting? Do you know your age is much less than my experience? Don't try to teach me the subject!" Not only he threw me out of the building but also issued a memo to my Superintendent and made my life more miserable!

I also know a Joint Commissioner whose ego is King Kong sized! Though a "vamana" by appearance he has a "vishwa roopa" ego! For him, the Inspector cadre is so insignificant and a trivia, that he wont even offer a chair to the Inspectors who come

to meet him in his cabin. Each particle in his mind would carry such a stinking bureaucratic ego that, without knowing I am an ex- Inspector, he confessed to me that, generally he makes any ex-Inspector Consultant to wait for hours in the corridor before meeting him. He got the shame of his life when I revealed that I am one of the cursed lot! My impression that there is a cult with a regal bloodline got altered after reading one of the articles by another bureaucrat-author in this column, weeks back. In her piece, she described about the prejudices between the IAS and the IRS! So, even if you are in the heaven, there exists discrimination, as long as, our beloved Mr. Ego is there!

After getting into the profession, I went to Mumbai to brief the most-sought-after Senior Advocate in a very important and a high revenue case! I had only read about him and it was the first opportunity to see him! After frisking us, we were ushered to the Senior's cabin, where the legendary advocate was elegantly sitting like Alexander the Great! I was standing like a devoted Baktha before Lord Balaji! When he asked me to explain the case, I went near the marker board and started writing a flowchart of events, to explain with better clarity. Suddenly, I got a hit on my back with a paper weight and I turned back with shock and pain only to hear the mercurial Senior Advocate saying, "I have not asked you to teach me. I just allowed you here only to assist me!" Till date, I could not understand as to what he meant by his gesture, as I was only doing, what I am expected to! Though he is a legal luminary, I am not able to subscribe to his arrogance and I personally rate him a below-par human being!

While recollecting these ugly vamanas and blemished super stars, I should also recollect about some great souls who have really impressed me with their extraordinary values for life and have reassured my belief in humanity! I have a short but sweet acquaintance with an Additional Commissioner, who is a real super star! I personally know that he went to the chair of a Sepoy to tender his apologies, for a mistake committed by him on account of a possible mis-communication! That too in the open verandah and when everyone was present! When one of the assesseees wanted to gift him for a reasoned and judicious order passed by him, he politely refused it and suggested to donate the amount to any old age home or a hospital, if possible! From every contingent to the Superintendents, literally wept like children, when he got transferred from that Commissionerate! Even though he got his President award for his meritorious service, I feel he deserves a double for being such a Samaritan! A rare breed indeed!

Similarly, I have also had the privilege of briefing some great Senior Advocates like Mr. Joseph Velapally and Mr. Arvind.P.Datar. Despite their esteemed status and roaring popularity, they have always been the simplest souls! They had been extraordinary listeners, boundlessly open minded and profoundly humble! Apart from their uncanny legal acumen, they stun me with their camaraderie, which they extend to one and all, irrespective of age, experience, status or knowledge! The comfort they provide to novices like me is a true exhibition of a graceful and a great virtue! Once when I was appearing with the Senior Advocate Datar, in the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala, the opposite counsel was literally teasing the Senior. Sitting beside him, I got too annoyed and wanted to reciprocate. But Senior controlled me saying that, "Taking it personally and retaliating may hamper the case proceedings" and also advised me that, in a Court, the client and the case are more important than any other thing! His golden words that, "For you and me it maybe another case! But, for the client it is his life which is at stake and one shall always remember that", is still echoing in my ears and shall reverberate inside me during every case I handle

for the rest of my life! He remained cool as a cucumber and finally succeeded in style! Maybe the greatness lies in their extreme simplicity and having their priorities right!

Though we all know the evils of ego, seldom we realize that we have a bigger one than the rest! By and large, we all tend to forget one important fact. Like other vices, ego is also not proprietary. If we can have one, everyone can also have one! Failure to realize and accept it is the root cause of all pandemonium!

Trying to track down my memory lane as to when I started developing my ego, I stand clueless and stranded! Is it when I was a lad and wished to be the baby of every christening? Is it when I was a boy and wished to be the top ranker on every exam I wrote? Is it when I was a youth and wished to be the lover of every beauty I saw? Or is it now, when I wish to win every race I run? Where did I start and when I am going to end? Maybe someday, when I realize that, I can't be the corpse in every funeral!

It would be more appropriate to conclude this piece with the thoughtful words of the great philosopher Leo Tolstoy! *"A man is like a fraction whose numerator is what he is and whose denominator is what he thinks of himself. The larger the denominator the smaller the fraction."*

Before Parting...

Now to the provocation of this piece! Last month, all of our staff with their families, were on a tour to Alleppey back waters. During the cruise, for some reasons, I got wild and was yelling at my driver. After sometime, my daughter was asking my wife as to why I was yelling at him. My wife replied that, "Dad was angry with him and so he shouted!" My sweet little daughter politely asked back, "What Muni uncle (driver) would do if he gets angry with papa?"