

IDEA, POWER, AND THE ARRIVING FUTURE

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Abstract

The tussle between power and idea for ascendancy dates back to the beginning of organized community living. Ever since, both have been after each other. History shows that however powerful and invincible power may seem to be at a certain stage, its hold on the lever of power gradually loosens. As such, and as the American defeat in Vietnam and collapse of the Soviet empire suggest, power gets weaker when it deals with the forces of change. While the history of the past, all pasts, has been written in red, solid initiatives should be taken to transform the role of power, and create more space for new ideas and new discourses. In order to ensure that the arriving future is encouraged to work for peace and justice for all, the uncontrolled power of power shouldn't be accepted as something inevitable. It should be converted into a positive energy to work for common good. But how? This paper attempts to answer this question.

Keywords: Idea of Power, Power of Idea, Libricide, Democide, Memory, Freedom, Arrogance of Power, Persecution, Knowledge House, Powerlessness of Power.

Introduction

Whatever color it picks up – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, violet or whatever-, a rainbow will be stripped of its identity and beauty if it wears only one color. Painted in any single color, it will represent dullness and joylessness. Its emergence on the horizon will be like the unfurling of a banner proclaiming *one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth, and one power*. Power loves the idea of *one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth* and *one power*, because it promises stability of the system and perpetual ascendancy of power. In

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contrast, idea campaigns for change and power sharing among the stake holders. This, in essence, is the issue in the contest between power and idea, and the reason why they fear each other.

However powerful power may be, it fears idea. It fears that an idea, especially a new idea, challenging the ascendancy of power and questioning the traditional way of governance, will ultimately diminish its power and weaken its foundation. Idea, on the other hand, suspects that power will neither listen to it nor allow it to blossom. It fears that power will bulldoze it and demolish it. It views power as a perpetrator of violence, protector of status quo, and promoter of injustice. So the conflict goes on. One may add that the conflict is not between two equal powers. At the beginning, it's more like a contest between an elephant and the ants. Power, like elephant, can trample the grass under its feet and the ants crawling on the grass. It can crush new ideas and new movements. Intoxicated by the idea of invincibility, power forgets that even tiny ants can sometime be dangerous and deadly. As a result, power often pays a heavy price for forgetting that an idea can be suppressed, and its advocates persecuted, but the idea may not vanish forever. It may appear, disappear and reappear. At times, power manages to restrain itself, and becomes less-intimidating, but it's usually confident enough and willing enough to unleash full power to destroy an idea it suspects to be dangerous. Likewise, an idea may seem to be very fragile and vulnerable, and it may be crushed under the feet of power, but its resurrection is always possible. History tells us that an idea, -suppressed and persecuted for long, can grow into a titanic force, ride like a hurricane, and dismantle the structure and foundation of power. As such, power can be powerful, less powerful and at times powerless. Likewise, an idea can be fragile, nomadic, and powerless, but it may take root, acquire strength, and strike one day to shake the foundation of power.

The tussle between power and idea has a long history and it seems endless. It's like a zero-sum game, which tempts both to destroy each other. Can the arriving future diminish tension between the two? Can this historically constructed and enmity-fueling relationship be transformed into an accommodative, if not collaborative, relationship? In other words, can power and idea, especially new idea, co-exist and develop trust in one another? It's clear that common sense demands that it should be so, but is it possible? Clearly a working relationship between them may induce the arriving future to bring about a positive, qualitative and radical change in the art and craft of governance at all

levels-local, regional, and global. This paper focuses on these and other related issues. It begins with a discussion on the idea of power and idea of idea.

Savage Power and Divine Idea

Power and idea are the two banks of a river, where power pushes water to change its course, and tries to put a blanket of sand on the other side with the intention to reduce it into a wasteland, a dry and infertile land. Idea, on the other side, pushes water to flood and over-flood the bank of power, and fertilize it so that new thinking may sprout, new ideas grow, and new perspectives glow. Unsurprisingly therefore, hostility towards one another remains the defining feature of their long relationship.

Viewed broadly as anti-idea, especially anti new idea, power is itself an idea. It's an idea which has lived for ages like the idea of freedom, and justice. Nevertheless, and by and large, and in almost all eras of organized community living, it has reigned and ruled as the dominant force. It continues to enjoy the same status in our turbulent times. Its importance remains undiminished. The history of humankind continues to be written in red by power. Similarly, its defiance of the divine remains writ large everywhere in the Buddhist Myanmar, Christian Rwanda, Hindu India, Jewish Israel, and communist North Korea A reference to the Islamic version of the beginning of human history may help illustrate the point.

As narrated in the *Quran*, when God declared that He wished to create a vice-regent for Himself on earth, the angels expressed their reservations. They said that this creature would engage in bloodshed, crime, hatred and vengeance. God, however, went on to create Adam, saying that He knew something what the angels didn't know. He then asked the angels to pay full respect to Adam by falling down at his feet. Satan, also known as devil, refused, saying that the angels were made of superior stuff as they were made of smokeless fire and this human was made of inferior stuff, made of clay. The devil was banished from heaven. However, ever since, God's prime creature, who was to be His vice-regent on earth, and who was made of clay, but who was also blessed with some spirit of God, has been swinging on choice like a pendulum between evil and good. The tussle between the treachery and savagery of power and nobility of spirit and idea has continued ever since. The Creator, however, hasn't abandoned hope in His creation. "The Creator", observes an eminent Islamic scholar from Pakistan, "Who wanted a new species to emerge had full confidence in the ultimate destiny of

man who, through knowledge, will conquer ignorance and, using his liberty aright, will ultimately attune his will to the will of God".¹

Throughout history, numerous arriving futures arrived, but they were overwhelmed by the conflict between unholy power and divine idea. The hope that the bloodthirsty and power hungry savage society would one day be transformed into a human society has lived on. These futures include the future that arrived soon after Adam's and Eve's settling down on the planet earth, when their two sons-Abel and Cain- moved on like the two banks of the river and the conflict between them resulted in the murder of Abel by his own brother Cain. It was the first murder of a human by another human on earth. Since then, human killing has become one of the most favorite engagements of the humans. Ali Shariati's² interpretation of the murder of Abel by Cain in his path-breaking study *On the Sociology of Islam* is worth referring here.³

Shariati refers to the earliest conflict between two humans, between Adam's two sons: Abel and Cain. He says that a conflict between the two developed when Cain preferred the woman betrothed to Abel over his own fiancée, and demanded the annulment of betrothal concluded with Adam's approval. When the case was placed before Adam, he asked both of them to offer a sacrifice to God, and declared that whoever's offer was accepted will be the winner. Being very cunning, Cain commits trickery and brings some withered corn as his sacrifice. In contrast, Abel was a straightforward and honest person. He loved his father and cared for his brother. He was a true follower of God, a devotee. As such, he offered God his most precious possession-his best camel. Abel's sacrifice was accepted, and the dispute was settled in his favor.

However, Cain was not to be amused. He doesn't accept the verdict. The scheming, cunning and ruthless Cain proceeds with his plan to remove Abel from the scene. He threatens his brother to kill him. However, Abel doesn't retaliate. He doesn't threaten to kill Cain. Neither does he make a scene by grieving aloud that God had accepted his sacrifice and it was now his right to put claim on the woman, who was also betrothed to him earlier. On the contrary, and as Shariati points out: 'Abel replies softly, kindly and submissively, 'but I will not raise my hand against you'.⁴ Cain is not moved. He has his fixed target, a fixed goal and it has to be achieved at any cost. Being selfish, greedy, and non-sacrificing, treacherous, and ruthless, Cain prevails upon the non-aggressive Abel and murders him.

The world has moved on since then, and it continues to be sharply divided between the followers of Cain and Abel, between power and idea. Here two important points need to be referred to: first, Abel as a person was physically eliminated, but Abel as an inspiring idea, as a shining monument of caring, sharing, sacrificing and doing good to other lives on; and second, however ruthless, unjust and life-threatening Cain was, Abel wasn't impressed. He didn't react violently against the violence of Cain, because he didn't want to hurt his brother, who was the son of his father, whom he loved. Again, he wasn't overpowered by power, nor was he afraid of the power of Cain. He therefore didn't seek any bargain to save his life. He gave up his life without fighting, but he never abandoned his just stand on the issue, and never told Cain to have his way and spare his life. Abel died, but continues to live on with honor, and Cain, the slave of power and treachery, remains condemned.⁵

Nevertheless, the conflict between the two continues-everywhere. It's a never-ending tussle between Abel's longing for justice through peaceful means and Cain's determination to achieve everything he desired to achieve by all possible means, including treachery and savagery. This conflict constitutes one of the major concerns of the religious movements for the transformation of the societies. History has recorded such movements. It's evident from the record that all the religions, at least at the early stages of their growth, encouraged peace and justice and sharing and caring, and sought to establish a universal and humanistic value system. They expressed their abhorrence of war, violence, injustice, exploitation and hate. They were the peace teachers and justice builders. Furthermore, the value system they cherished most was not a part of their teaching only, it was also reflected in practice. The biographies of the founders and leaders of different faiths clearly show that they were fairly successful in establishing human societies, where Abel's idea of living together in harmony and peace under a just system prevailed. In their governance models, Cain's idea of power had no space to root itself.⁶

However, Cain couldn't be kept at the gate for long. He and his idea of power snaked into the fortresses of different religions, seeded conflicts, fueled hatred, committed violence, and promoted divisiveness among the followers of the same religion and among the adherents of different religions. The devastating idea of 'my religion is the best religion' led to organized and unorganized riots and bloodshed in different parts of the world. Military conquests of the territories of the people of other faiths were justified in the name of religion. So were justified

the murders of millions and millions of followers of other religions and destruction of hundreds and thousands of worship houses all over the world. The split in Christianity converted the Christian world into a bloodthirsty and killing world during its long period of sectarian violence. Likewise, Islamic history is a grim record of Muslims' fighting among themselves and with the followers of other faiths. In the name of the glory of religion, religious power was institutionalized, and fascism promoted. For a long time, indeed for a very long time, the noble ideas of religions were slaughtered at the altar of religions, and this practice has continued. A major consequence of conflict and war in the name of religion as well in the name of ethnicity and tribalism is the reduction of freedoms, and poverty of ideas.

Clearly, a country impoverished in political pluralism and innovative ideas, its political and cultural discourse flooded with monologue, and its unwillingness to own and promote new ideas and critical thinking, is like a rainbow painted in a single color or a sky without stars. If not already, eventually such a country will turn into a thought desert. The state of affairs in the developing countries like Afghanistan, Egypt, Myanmar, Nigeria, North Korea, Somalia clearly suggests that those societies get destroyed which destroy freedoms and deny new ideas to take root and blossom. Small wonder therefore that the journey of a number of post-colonial third world countries toward progress and prosperity seems to have stalled, and in some cases, even reversed.

Destroying Ideas and Cradles of Ideas

Historically speaking, the relationship between power and idea has almost all along been uneasy, complex, confrontational and problematic. The problem at the heart of the issue is fear. Power fears idea. It fears that idea, especially new idea, will diminish its authority, domination and influence, weaken its foundation, and ultimately destroy it. As such, it builds up its own empire fortified with its own idea as to how to move along, and tries to destroy all those ideas which challenge, obstruct or reject its roadmap for the future. That's why it tries to destroy the past, all troublesome pasts, by destroying the libraries and burning books.

The point may be elaborated by referring to the incidents of deliberate destruction of libraries, burning of books, and killing, imprisoning and exiling of philosophers, poets, novelists, playwrights, painters, and performers. For power, these are the evil people led by the dangerous people like Socrates, Gautama

Buddha, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr. and other visionaries. Worse still, these are the trouble makers, who question traditional wisdom, offer fresher perspectives, and project critical thinking. In the long run, their thoughts mine the libraries and the societies. So why not burn them down? Raising the question 'Why burn a library?', American author Jeffrey Garret observes in his review article covering three important studies on the destruction of libraries⁷: 'Libraries do not produce food; cannot fuel cars, tanks, or airplanes; nor do they as a rule represent a value that can be readily deposited into foreign bank accounts. So why not just ignore them? If then a library falls victim to collateral damage in a conflict, what a pity-but in the end, it is never a strategically significant loss'. 'Stuff happens', as Donald Rumsfeld, American Defense Secretary under President Gerald Ford (1977 to 1979) and George Bush (2001 to 2006), put it in his famous press conference held after the fall of Baghdad in April 2003'.⁸

Historically speaking, the importance of preserving memory and cultural heritage was recognized since the very beginning of organized community living. It led to the blossoming of the art, craft and culture of storytelling in different parts of the world. In due course, the idea of preserving the past gained due recognition and repositories of different kinds were instituted. According to a study, a 'temple in the Babylonian town of Nippur, dating from the first half of the 3rd millennium BC was found to have a number of rooms filled with clay tablets, suggesting a well-stocked archive or library. 'The study adds that similar 'collections of Assyrian clay tablets of the second millennium BC were found at Tell el -Amarna in Egypt' and 'Ashurbanipal (reigned 668-627 BCE), the last of the great kings of Assyria, maintained an archive of some 25,000 tablets, comprising transcripts and texts systematically collected from temples throughout his kingdom'.⁹ This great Assyrian Library of Nineveh in northern Iraq, British Professor, writer and broadcaster Jim Al-Khalili points out, is the 'first systematically organized library in the world'.¹⁰ However, Ashurbanipal's Library of Nineveh isn't the only legendary library of ancient times. The list is long and it includes a number of highly impressive libraries.¹¹ These libraries had once risen into prominence. Now they exist in history books only.

Libraries rise and fall like empires. They indicate the direction and stage of cultural and civilizational advancement or decay there is, indeed, a significant connectedness between the rise of a library and the rise of a society and civilization. It's because a library is much more than a knowledge house or a treasure house of memories and experiences. It's also a bonding force, a cradle of ideas, a dream house, a hope house, a door into the future. It is, in fact, much more than even all this. It's a

postulation, an assertion writ large on the sky of history that a territory and a people can be conquered or overpowered by power, but not the ideas and dreams preserved by the libraries and memories.

Small wonder therefore that power has very little liking for library. It doesn't trust memory houses and knowledge houses. These are not reliable and safe sanctuaries. Power fears that a library may defy power and the agents of power in so many ways. It also fears that a library may keep the hope of a new dawn alive by keeping the memory of the other pasts and the longing for other futures alive among the people conquered or overpowered, and it may continue to serve silently as a cradle of new ideas and new dreams, especially during challenging times. Power therefore looks at libraries as minefields, and tries to destroy them, rob them of their precious possessions, and disempower them. Power has been doing this for a long time.

Whatever else it may or may not be, recorded history is a sad record of lost knowledge, lost wisdom, and lost history. This terrible loss has been caused by the unleashing of dark power by the invading, colonizing and conquering armies, extremist religious, tribal, ethnic and political gangs and mobs, and by other agents of power. All this often led to the destruction of libraries, looting and burning of books and manuscripts, and stifling of new ideas and new voices. A number of studies prepared in the recent times reveal the scale and extent of the huge loss suffered by humanity from the ancient times to the present. However, the libricide¹², which had begun in the ancient times, hasn't ended yet. 'The destruction of library', Charles-Henri Nyns rightly points out 'is a never-ending story'.¹³ A number of studies provide details about such ugly incidents.¹⁴

These and several other studies identify many enemies of books and memories. The UNESCO study of 1996 on Lost Memory, for instance, refers to the work of printer and bibliographer William Blades entitled *Enemies of Books*. He mainly identifies accidental causes like fire, gas, heat and natural causes like age, neglect and destructive work of insects as the main enemies of books¹⁵ Fire, floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, insects, lack of financial support and neglect of the facilities during the times of pandemics and famines are doubtless some major causes of the destruction of libraries. These speak volumes on lack of administrative planning and preparedness to face and manage such emergency situations. However, there are also some other causes like the destruction of libraries during war and after, during attacks by the extremist religious, tribal and ethnic groups and other constituencies of violence, and during the reign of totalitarian regimes. This story is a totally different story. It's about

arrogance of power and power's hidden fear of the conquered or overpowered people, their pasts, their ideas and their memories. That's why the conquerors and invaders have very often resorted to mass-killing and destruction of cultural heritage. However, the invaders didn't always succeed in erasing the past and banishing the memory for ever. Often the dead returned through the invisible doors of memories and libraries, and the game changed soon after.

In his study on genocide and democide¹⁶ Indiana University Professor Allen D. Grimshaw, refers to mass killings throughout history. He informs that the ancient rulers, particularly the Assyrians, killed foreign civilians during times of war, mutilated captives, raped, threw the nobles from towers, and destroyed cities, while the destruction and leveling of Carthage was caused by the Romans, who also killed all the survivors of the siege. Again, during the successive invasions of Mongols, millions were murdered and mounds of human heads/skulls were erected outside the destroyed cities. Grimshaw's study also mentions the American holocaust of the natives, large-scale human killing by the European colonizers in Asia and Africa, slaughter of the humans by the Nazis, and Russian and Chinese communists, genocide committed in Cambodia by the Pol Pot regime and those committed by others in many other countries. He informs that the population of the Americas was greater than those of Europe and Africa, but eight million Native Americans died from direct violence and diseases within 21 years of Columbus's landing. Grimshaw also provides some detail about genocides and democides committed in the later periods and asks a question, a question frequently asked by the concerned scholars of different eras: why don't the victims resist their attackers, or, at the very least, attempt escape?¹⁷

The surrender and total passivity is partly because power instills fear in the heart and mind of the targeted victims, the survivors and their succeeding generations, and constantly warns that any attempt to raise their head against power will be crushed; not only the resisters but their entire families and communities would be tortured and done to death; their women and children raped and enslaved; and their properties seized. The survivors and their succeeding generations remain condemned to live without dream and hope under the starless sky, where the rainbows doesn't dance. The regime of *one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth, and one power* is ruthlessly imposed, but the fear of the arriving new future on the wings of new ideas continues to hound power. It's this fear of idea and the fear of an unwished arriving future, which drives power crazy, and pushes it to destroy the libraries and burn the books. If not the sole factor, power's fear that the dead would return one day on the wings of the banished memory, and their shattered and destroyed identities would

regroup one day, was a major factor in prompting the Nazi regime and many other totalitarian regimes to destroy the libraries and burn the books. The same factor influenced the decision of the communists in the Soviet Union and the satellite states in Eastern Europe and also in China to suppress the other knowledge and stifle the other voices. Likewise, Saddam Hussein's seven month occupation of Kuwait from August 1990 to February 1991, and American invasion and occupation of Iraq from 2003 to 2011 caused enormous damage to the cultural heritage and knowledge houses of Kuwait and Iraq. When the terrorists destroyed thousands of shrines, worship houses, schools and libraries in a number of countries during the last forty years or so, their main intention was to erase the past, and impose one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth, and one power.

Power of Bosnia-Herzegovina Idea

The destruction of the libraries of Bosnia-Herzegovina is a classic case of power's fear of idea and its fear of the return of the past and past memories. Even ethnic cleansing of the Bosnian Muslims community was not enough the past had to be erased completely and all the evidences of a Muslim past in the country had to be removed for ever. That's why the Serb forces targeted not only the libraries but also the 'local archives, destroying land registries with particular zeal 'and even the gravestones were bulldozed as if to "eradicate even the suggestion that the Muslims had been buried in Bosnian soil'.¹⁸ Though the Serbian power committed biblicide as well as culturicide to prevail over the idea of an independent, sovereign and pluralist Bosnia-Herzegovina, it couldn't prevent a new future from arriving and consolidating the idea and identity of Bosnia. Bosnia, however, isn't a solitary example of the failure of power to prevail upon an idea whose time had come. Examples abound. One should also note that it isn't only during the times of wars and terrorism that the libraries are destroyed, books burned, censorship imposed, and restrictions on access to information and free flow of ideas clamped, war on word, idea, and history has been waged throughout history by the absolutist rulers as well, and they generally inflicted this war on their people.

Power, Idea, and the Absolutist Regimes

Ever since the images of the silent words were drawn and understood, words spoken and reciprocated, words written and read, and words printed and perused, the importance of word as a tool of communication has progressively and dramatically increased. With the passage of time, books as a repository of words, images, ideas, and memories have attained worldwide recognition. Highlighting the importance of book

in her address at the Library of Congress in 1980, American historian and author Barbara Tuchman had observed 'Books are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill. Without books, the development of civilization would have been impossible'.¹⁹ However, power has all along been uncomfortable with the spoken, written and printed words projecting new, innovative, transformative and game changing ideas. Power seems to have agreed all along with what a character in a dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451*, says: 'A book is a loaded gun in the house next door'.²⁰ The novel presents a future American society where books are outlawed and firemen burn any that they find. During the rule of president Donald Trump (January 20, 2017 to January 20, 2021), the United States wasn't too far away from the stage, where the author of the novel Ray Bradbury feared the US would be one day.

History tells us that the outlawing, seizure and burning of books, restricting the flow of information and free discussion on vital issues, and persecution of men and women of ideas by the powerful is an old tradition and practice. More than two thousand years ago, Qin Shi Huang emerged as the founder of the Qin dynasty, creator of the first unified Chinese Empire and first Emperor of China. He ruled from 246 BCE to 210 BCE. He is remembered for his military exploits and conquests, establishing a united China and rooting the idea of unified China as a distinct political and territorial idea. He is also remembered for the remarkable administrative, material, and cultural advancement China achieved under his rule. He is, however, remembered no less as an emperor savagely ruling over a vast landmass stretching from 'Mongolia down to Hong Kong, and from the sea right the way across to Sichuan', a territory equal to 'the whole Roman Empire added together'.²¹ This powerful emperor was 'constantly in fear of how he could control this vast new territory with so many cultures and so many different groups of people'.²² He was also uncomfortable with 'China's traditions of Confucian scholarship and his fear of the intellectual was deep rooted'.²³ Equally importantly, he was concerned about his place in history.

Emperor Qin Shin Huang, who had presented himself as the builder of a new China, disliked the idea of being compared with his predecessors as he was far superior to them. He claimed that he was blessed with divine ancestry, and he was '*the First Emperor (Shihuangdi) of the Chinese race and the beginning of the culture by posterity*'. He decreed that 'all histories, except the official history of the Qin state' be burned and 'those who have in their possession *the Classic of Odes*,

the Classic of History, and other works of various philosophers should hand in the works, which should be subsequently burned'. It was also decreed that 'those who criticized the present regime by invoking the ancient writings should be put to death, together with all members of their families, and government officials who knew that violations occurred but opted not to prosecute should be regarded as having committed the same crime as that committed by the offenders'.²⁴ Explaining the purpose of these measures, Deakin University scholar Xiangshu Fang quotes Sima Qian who had said that the purpose was 'to make the common people ignorant and to see to it that no one in the empire used the past to criticize the present'. In the midst of his book burning campaign, the emperor issued order for the severe punishment of the dissenters, and in 213 BC, 460 Confucian scholars were allegedly buried alive.²⁵ However, the absolutist power of Emperor Qin Shi Huang could neither bury Confucianism, nor save the Qin Empire for long. An Empire which was wished to blossom for thousands of years withered away in fifteen years.

During more than two thousand years after the collapse of the Qin dynasty, thousands and thousands of absolute rulers tried to rule over their empires and countries with the help of brute force and through a ruthless system of censorship and persecution of intellectuals, thinkers, philosophers, writers, and political opponents. They tried to erase the past and crush all such ideas which they thought to be dangerous for their rule. However, neither memory could be banished forever, nor the targeted idea could be crushed forever. Similarly mob violence could never perpetually terrorize any people anywhere. As a matter of fact, even the most powerful states often found themselves helpless before the collective resistance of a people in romance with destiny. This powerlessness of power may be explained by referring to the collapse of American power in Vietnam and the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Idea of Vietnam and Powerlessness of USA

Vietnam is a classic example of the powerlessness of power. It signifies the triumph of the idea of united, independent, and sovereign state of Vietnam over the mightiest military power in history: the United States of America. As to how did this happen is briefly explained below.

To begin with, France colonized Vietnam along Annam, Cambodia, Cochin China in 1887 and Laos in 1893. This area was collectively known as *Indochine Francais* or French Indochina. French colonialism of Vietnam continued

for more than fifty years. When the Germans occupied France in June 1940 and Japan occupied Vietnam in September 1940, the Vietnamese movement for freedom gained a new momentum under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh. On September 2, 1945, a little over two weeks after Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945, Vietnam declared independence. It wasn't acceptable to France. As such, a bloody Franco-Vietnamese war followed. It ended with the defeat of France. Geneva Accord, signed in 1954, split Vietnam at the 17th parallel into two states: South Vietnam and North Vietnam. The popular and powerful movement for the unification of Vietnam was declared a communist or communist-sponsored armed campaign by the United States and its allies. Another bloody war, this time between the US and its allies and Vietnam, followed. It was a deadlier war. It continued till the fall of Saigon, the capital city of South Vietnam, on April 30, 1975 and airlifting of the last few remaining Americans still in South Vietnam. Vietnam celebrates its reunification day on April 30 every year.

Vietnam War is one of the most devastating and tragic wars ever fought. It caused enormous sufferings, and its wounds are still not fully healed. During the war, more than two million young Americans were sent to fight against a people whom they didn't know and who had not done any harm to them or their country. More than 58,000 of them died in the war, 300,000 were wounded, and almost 14,000 completely disabled. Vietnam mourns over two million dead. Four million were wounded and ten million suffered forced displacement from their homes. In addition, more than five million acres of forest and croplands were destroyed by 18 million gallons of poisonous chemical herbicide.²⁶

A brief discussion on two aspects of Vietnam War may help put the idea of power and power of idea in context. First, power is fascinated by the idea of power. While strategizing the future, facing challenges on the way or making plan and preparing for the targets to be achieved, power relies heavily on the use of power. It usually attempts to cover up the brutality of power by presenting noble ideas, sentiments and goals. For instance, the colonizing European powers raised the bogey of white man's burden and civilizing mission to cover their savage rule over the colonies for decades, and in some cases, for more than a century.

Fall of the Soviet Union Idea

Between eleven and twelve o'clock on the night of March 15, 1917, Nikolai II Alexandrovich Romanov or Nicholas II, the last Czar of Russia, signed by pencil the historic document of abdication. It signalled the end of three hundred and

four year rule of the Romanov dynasty-Russia's last imperial dynasty. Soon after, he and his family members were arrested. Nicholas II, who was once a powerful ruler, and who had 'dispatched thousands of political prisoners to Siberian forced labor, imprisonment or exile' was later 'transported to detention in Tobolsk', the historic capital of the Siberian region.²⁷ On the night of July 16-17, 1918, he, his wife, and his five children were shot and bayoneted to death.

By this time, the Bolshevik revolution, which had seized power in October 1917, was rapidly firming up its rule over the vast landmass. Riding the wave of a new political idea, the revolutionary leaders pledged that the people would no more suffer absolute rule. Instead, they would be governed and guided by a unique political idea and system, which would bring about an era of peace, prosperity, equality, and happiness for all.

Commencing with the abolition of monarchy in March 1917, and triumph of Russian Revolution in October 1917, the Russian state began its revolutionary journey with rapid strides. It successfully handled the civil war, dealt firmly with the foreign troops on its borders, brought the restive nationalities like Moldovans, Chechens, Georgians, Kazakhs and others under its sway, established its control over the territories of former Russian empire. The Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics was established on December 30, 1922. It also embarked on an ambitious program of rapid industrialization, weaponization and modernization program, especially under the impregnable leadership of Joseph Stalin, who served as the Secretary General of Soviet Communist Party from 1922 to 1953 and as Premier of the state from 1941 to 1953. Under Stalin's iron rule, the Soviet Union successfully defended its vast landmass during the Second World War, pushed back the massive attacks of German forces, attained new territorial gains, and brought several Eastern European countries under its tutelage. It emerged as a super power after the war, expanded its influence in the emerging third world countries, and challenged the United States and its allies everywhere. On August 29, 1949, only a little over four years after the US, it conducted its first nuclear test, and competed with USA in nuclear weapon development program and space program.

In only forty years after the Russian Revolution, the post-Czarist state emerged an awesome state had emerged on the horizon. It was a mesmerizing state for its own citizens, allies and friends abroad, and a terrifying state for its adversaries. It had achieved all this by strictly following the roadmap prepared by

power, hoisting the banner of *one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth, and one power*, overpowering more than hundred nationalities and building ‘a prison of nations’²⁸, purging political opponents, suppressing critical thinking and new ideas, and persecuting the weavers of new ideas and new dreams. During the reign of Stalin, for example, a Great Purge had taken place between 1936 and 1938 ‘to eliminate dissenting members of the Communist Party and anyone else’ who was considered a threat to the ruler. While estimates vary, experts reportedly believe that ‘at least 750,000 people were executed during the Great Purge’, and ‘more than a million other people were sent to forced labor camps, known as Gulags’.²⁹ The policy of persecuting dissenters, opening doors for controlled knowledge only, and persecuting the best minds and best souls for their independent or dissenting views continued after the death of Stalin in 1953. The list of the persecuted writers, scientists, journalists, teachers, lawyers, dissenters persecuted during the reign of Stalin’s successors is also very long. It includes the name of very distinguished Soviet citizens including Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, an eminent philosopher, novelist, political prisoner, and Nobel Laureate, and eminent nuclear scientist, dissident, human rights activist, and Nobel Laureate- Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov,

When the German forces attacked the Soviet Union on June 21, 1941, Sakharov was only twenty year old. He had completed third year in Physics at Moscow University, but his genius was already discovered.. He was exempted from military service and treated as sort of ‘a national asset. He graduated in 1942, and served as engineer in a military factory during the remaining war years. He received the equivalent of PhD degree in 1947, started publishing scholarly papers in the leading scientific journals, and got actively involved in the top secret Soviet hydrogen bomb project. On August 12, 1953, the Soviet Union conducted its first thermonuclear device. The same year, Sakharov, who is generally regarded the father of Soviet H-Bomb, was elected to the Soviet Academy of Sciences, and awarded first of the three ‘Hero of Socialist Labor’ titles-Soviet Union’s highest civilian award-for heroic and distinguished achievements.³⁰ However, this brilliant atomic weapon scientist gradually became disillusioned with the way things were being managed in his country. .

According to American journalist Harrison Salisbury, in 1958, at the age of thirty seven, Andrei Sakharov ‘began to thrust his thoughts outward-from the intense, narrow world of applied physics and nuclear weapons production and away from the remote center where he and his colleagues conducted their

research in monastic seclusion-to the more earthly problems of the society in which he lived'.³¹ Being convinced that further atomic testing in the air was not needed for scientific purposes, and it would only fuel the arms race between USA and USSR, he wrote to the Soviet government in 1958 to stop testing. He continued to press the government in the later years as well. However, the government went ahead with the tests. This was very frustrating for Khrushchev. In a meeting with Hendrick Smith, the New York Times correspondent in Moscow, he told the journalist: 'I gradually began to understand the criminal nature not only of nuclear tests but of the enterprise as a whole. I began to look on it and other world problems from a broader, human perspective'. He added: 'I could not stop something I knew was wrong and unnecessary. It was terrible. I had an awful sense of powerlessness. After that I was a different man. I broke with my surroundings. It was a basic break'.³²

From 1958 till his death in 1989, undoubtedly a tormenting spell of his life spread over thirty one long years, Sakharov struggled to put across his ideas to make his country strong, prosperous, and peaceful. He urged the powers who mattered in the Soviet state to help transform the Soviet society, and prevent it from committing suicide bombing. He wrote letters to his government, issued manifestoes and memorandums, fearlessly expressed his views whenever he got an opportunity, mobilized the intellectual community to raise its voice against the violent political system imposed in the name of *one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth, and one power*, launched a vigorous human rights movement, and warned the Soviet state of the dangers ahead. He 'called for a general liberalization, an end to the political prison system, an end to the use of psychiatric institutions to punish sane persons, full legal rights for all Soviet citizens, an end to repression on political, ideological, and religious grounds, freedom of information and press, full restoration of the rights of all nationalities and individuals repressed by Stalin, a rule of law, an end to dogmatism, adventurism, and aggression. He called for basic economic reform, democratic elections, efforts to modernize agriculture, a radical improvement in the educational system, a full-scale anti-pollution and environmental program'.³³

Brimming with confidence and intoxicated by power, the Soviet Union paid no heed to Sakharov's assessment of the state of the Soviet state, the way forward suggested by him was brushed aside as ridiculous, and his idea of a new Soviet Union was rejected with contempt. The state controlled media demonized him, the intelligence agencies hounded him, and many intellectuals, scientists and

public leaders close to the corridors of power presented him as a traitor. He was stripped of the prestigious job he had; he was denied the permission to visit Oslo to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace, awarded to him in 1975; he was deprived of the title of Hero of Socialist Labor and all other decorations and awards. On January 22, 1980, Sakharov was arrested, following his public protests against Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979, and exiled to Gorky, a major city on the Volga river, closed for foreigners³⁴ He remained in exile in Gorky for almost seven years. He died in December 1989.

Mikhail Gorbachev became the virtual ruler of the Soviet Union in March 1985, when he became the General Secretary of its Communist Party. Later in 1990, he was elected as President. Though he moved very fast to introduce spectacular reforms under the banner of *perestroika* ('restructuring') and *glasnost* (openness), and introduced significant changes in the domestic and foreign policy of his country, it was already too late. He couldn't prevent a super power, a powerful nuclear weapon power from collapsing. It was now paying the price for not listening to Sakharov. The mighty Soviet power soon realized that it had no power to protect the Soviet Union. Neither it had the power to a new idea whose time had come. This idea was the idea of freedom, justice and pluralism, which it had suppressed since the advent of the revolution. Only the idea of a new Soviet Union could have saved the Soviet Union from dissolution in December 1991.

Conclusion

A study of the circumstances leading to the collapse of the Soviet empire, defeat of the French and American military forces in Vietnam, and fall of other empires, kingdoms and totalitarian regimes may suggest that they fell down, because they relied very heavily on power and on its ruthless use for staying on. Another major cause is the temptation of power to impose a system of governance based on *one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth, and one power*. It has never worked in the long run. Many empires, kingdoms, and nation-states were destroyed, because they were firmly ruled for longer times by ruthless rulers and ruthless political systems. A country which is ruled by power alone perishes by the power of idea. An idea may be suppressed and banished, but idea returns to expose the powerlessness of power.

Equally importantly, knowledge and especially new knowledge is important for a state to be prosperous and strong. Likewise, new ideas, especially new ideas, are important. Also important is the cultural heritage, and memories of

the pasts. Of course, it's possible that a people may be overpowered by the intervention of superior foreign military forces, by home grown or foreign terrorists, or by the native tyrants. It's also possible that the memories and dreams of the overpowered people may be banished, their pasts slaughtered, and their cultural heritage including the libraries and books and manuscripts destroyed. Again, it's possible that governance based on *one color, one idea, one narrative, one truth, and one power* may be imposed, and it may be claimed that everything is fine. However, time changes. Banished memories return. Dreams come back. Hope and fearlessness also return. And then power becomes powerless. As the US defeat in Vietnam and dissolution of the Soviet Union indicate, and as the emergence of Bosnia-Herzegovia as an independent, sovereign, pluralist state with its Muslim past and identity in tact indicate, power cannot enslave a territory, its people, and their imagination for long.

Moreover, it's likely that power is transformed into an energetic and positive force as it is already in several prosperous and happy countries like Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Japan, Canada and New Zealand. To achieve this goal, sufficient space will have to be provided to new ideas and new dreams. Again, if many pasts in the past were violently and ruthlessly ruled, it doesn't mean that the arriving future should also be ruled brutally and ruthlessly. New ideas, new dreams along with sprouting freedoms can shape a new future, a much better future. True that the history of the past was written in red, but shouldn't the twenty first century learn lessons from the deadly pasts spread over thousands of years, and ensure that that the history of the twenty first century isn't written in red.

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