

Essence of India's ancient heritage

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By Enath Easwaran

RETALIATING against injustice was a sign of great weakness to my grandmother. Her reasoning was baffling to me in my youth.

When I would come to her misery from some schoolyard quarrel, she refused to offer sympathy, no matter the provocation that prompted me to enter the skirmish. "If he does something bad to you, all the more reason you should do something kind to him to set him right," she would say.

Simple and unlettered, she was the essence of India's ancient matrilineal heritage, a woman of great forbearance and compassion, whose patience imparted wisdom that I carried something deep inside.

Of late, my native state of Kerala has confounded experts with a literacy rate and health standards that surpass the rest

selfishness that brings richness to life, a richness that affluent children today too often seek in vain at shopping malls. We treasured our ties to each other, recognising them as gifts from God to help us grow in love, not as fetters to hold back personal progress.

Though in my early years I did not understand my grandmother's admonition against unkind words, her quiet example and that of my mother were living proof that returning kindness for unkindness could be accomplished only by someone secure enough to endure disappointment. Their trust in fundamental human goodness left an indelible mark on me. They refused to harbour ill will even when someone hurt or provoked them.

In the 90 years of her life, my mother was not known to utter an unkind word against

CELEBRATION

BANDS WILL BLARE AS SOLDIERS, SAILORS, MARINES, VETERANS AND ALL THE OTHER UNIFORMED SERVICES MARCH ON SATURDAY JUNE 8 IN TROPICAL HUMID HEAT THAT HAS ALREADY DESCENDED ON THE US CAPITAL SETTING HISTORIC RECORDS FOR THE MONTH OF MAY -- ALSO NEVER BEFORE. THEN, JUST TWO DAYS LATER, IT WILL HAPPEN ALL OVER AGAIN IN NEW YORK WHERE THE TRADITIONAL PARADE WILL LAST THREE TIMES AS LONG!

GOES ON

From



Washington

IN just a few days now, on Saturday June 8, Washington will have what may be its greatest celebration ever.

Tanks and armour will roll through the streets. Huge B-52s and gleaming fighter aircraft will streak through the skies.

Flags will flutter from every lamp pole and street light as never before.

Bands will blare as soldiers, sailors, marines, veterans and all the other uniformed services march in the tropical humid heat that has already descended on the American capital setting historic records for the month of May -- also as never before.

And in all likelihood, newspapers are already speculating, more than a million spectators will gawk and shout; scream and sometimes tearfully cry. Gazing in awe at the parade of human and material power that will pass before them will be a sea of American patriots and believers.

The hundreds of thousands that came to march in protest back in January will be nowhere to be seen, forgotten by their fellow citizens, miserable in their impotence.

President Bush, General Norman Schwarzkopf, pictured right, and Chairman Colin Powell will all officiate together -- modern heroes not to all but to a great many.

And no doubt CNN will bring this American extravaganza to much of the world as well -- another first in this age of the global village.

Then, just two days later, it will happen all over again

in New York City -- except that traditional ticker-tape parade will last three times as long!

Some will say Saddam Hussein is responsible for all this unnecessary and undeserved American hoopla; that Saddam Hussein provided just the excuse the Americans needed to unleash their technological firepower; that the Iraqi leader really screwed up and brought about just the opposite of what he has spent his adult lifetime trying to achieve. And they will be right.

Others will say that America, like Britain before her, is in reality a contracting empire; and that contracting empires traditionally look for ways to project their waning power and reassure themselves even in the mildest of their declining dominance. And they will be right.

Still others will insist that no matter what problems America faces, that judged relative to others, especially when measures against the other now self-emulating superpower, the US is not in such bad shape. And, relatively, they too will be right.

Never mind that unemployment and underemployment have grown to rampant proportions in the Reagan-Bush era -- greater than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Never mind that drugs and

crime increasingly have much of American society threatened and traumatised.

Never mind that just a few blocks from the Washington parade route past the White House the streets of Washington recently exploded in an orgy of violence and destruction that forced the mayor to declare a multi-night curfew.

Never mind that many key American cities are quite literally on the verge of bankruptcy with basic public services -- including libraries and zoos -- being cut back, transportation systems in urgent need of basic repairs, taxes ever-rising and services ever-declining.

Never mind that the US Savings and Loan fiasco has called into question the basic stability of the American financial and banking systems as at no time since the banking collapse a couple of generations ago.

Never mind that in just the past decade America has completely reversed its financial status in the world from being the world's greatest creditor nation to the international communities' greatest debtor.

And never mind that the at first neglected and still underfunded AIDS crisis increasingly is threatening the lives of hundreds of thousands of Americans and could soon spread to true epidemic proportions.

The largely unspoken reality of the day is that the American "cold war". But maybe this really

wasn't so much an American victory as a Soviet loss; maybe Bolshevism was never a very adequate political petri disk for testing the growth of socialism and the theories of communism in the first place.

Whatever, the American polity these days is repeatedly gorging itself with ongoing celebrations of its "great victory" over a third world country just a fraction of its size that was bombed for months by unprecedented air power for which it had no defence.

Yet while the celebration goes on hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children remain in danger of malnutrition, illness, and death.

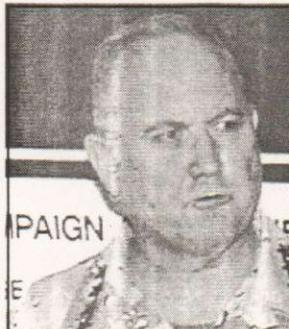
In a world of modern tribes called nations this is all of our fate.

While one tribe prospers another suffers. While one tribe gorges itself, others starve.

The technology of warfare is surely "modern". Indeed, human technological achievements are such that the planet Nature is itself endangered as never before.

But human morality remains that of our ancestral, tribal, selfish, past.

And all the shouting, flag-waving and celebrating that continues in this land -- while at the same time so much suffering has erupted in the wake of the great American military victory -- perfectly illustrates how primitive and self-centred a species we remain.



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BUT HUMAN MORALITY REMAINS
THAT OF OUR ANCESTRAL, TRIBAL, SELFISH PAST!