

Q1 True Wealth is the wealth of the Soul.

Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" takes the reader into a well crafted literary world starring the beautiful Miss Elizabeth, so full of pride and the handsome Mr. Darcy, swimming in his sea of Prejudice. However, it's only through their life's experiences that they realize true wealth and beauty is the aura projected by one's soul, one's nature. Not from external appearances or material well-being. The same is portrayed by the transformation of their characters.

Through this best selling classic

Miss Austen had captured one of the fundamental truths of life of how Materialism or External Appearances bows before the strength of one's Soul and Spirituality. However, this doesn't mean that material wealth isn't crucial. More often than not, material wealth paves the pathway towards wealth of a peaceful Soul.

good
core
argument

In the above context, "wealth" can be characterized as something an individual deems valuable, thereby showcasing its subjective nature. The phrase "true wealth", on the other hand alludes towards a majority subscription of a hierarchical ~~needs~~ system of assets. In such a hierarchy, one's Soul which Thiruvalluvar has described as "inherent and intrinsic nature" of a person, takes precedence over materially acquired wealth.

gth

The enigma surrounding the concept of soul has had a long standing history; both in Western and Oriental culture. Western culture likens

the concept of soul to "the Holy Spirit".

Ans
Context
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On the other hand, Oriental culture, be it Vedas, Upanishads, Jain philosophy or Hinayana Buddhism deems soul to be a "meta-physical element".

This meta-physical element is all encompassing, its "nourishment" has been described as life's purpose and soul's liberation via Moksha, as life's objective. Some like Socrates called for soul's nourishment via acquisition of knowledge.

Whereas, followers of Adi Shankaracharya believe

in realization of life's purpose by
seeking union of the Soul (Atman) with
the revered Brahman.

Hence, "Soul" is the defining
genesis of Oriental culture; ~~which~~ This
made Gandhiji urge Indians to learn
to ~~value~~ ^{treasure} their culture, their roots and
values. "The wealth of the soul" takes
many forms, Gandhiji had used.

It takes the form of
Love was shown to the world by Mother
Teresa. Mother Teresa had said, "Hunger
for love is much more difficult to extinguish
than hunger for food". Likewise, the soul's
wealth calls for compassion, shown by
Baba Amte towards lepers. It embraces
empathy shown by Dr. Abdul Kalam when
he designed "aluminium light weight calipers"

very
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for children afflicted by polio. And it recognizes "humaneness" towards all other life forms, as shown by conduct of Jane Goodall, whose loving conduct towards chimpanzees won the hearts of many.

Hence, the crucial importance of valuing one's soul is beyond any debate. But why should one value the wealth of soul above other wealths one has? Why should the wealth of soul be deemed as "the one true wealth"?

It's true that over one's lifespan, one acquires many forms of wealth. Such wealth can take

many forms, as Paulo Coelho
describes in his master piece,
"The Alchemist". It could be money,
fame, the wealth of personal connections,
power, popularity etcetera.

But aren't these "the cherries"
everyone "wants on their cakes"? Yes,
they do. Material wealth adds dimensions
of Self-Actualization to one's life; It
fuels their sense of "accomplishments",
releasing amounts of endorphins and
adrenaline.

However, it's only when
one tries to picture his/her life
without these external qualifications,
can he/she truly appreciate the wealth

of his soul as his/her "ultimate
asset or wealth".

This is because one is
born with his soul, unlike other

forms of acquired wealth. Secondly, one's
soul harbours universal qualities of
"Kindness", which is a language, which the
deaf can hear and the blind can see.

Thirdly, as portrayed by the concept
of "Transmigration of Soul", the wealth of
soul is infinite and indestructible.

Yet, one cannot deny
that understanding the "true wealth"
as the "wealth of the soul", requires
significant quantum of self-introspection,

Very
apt
analysis

specially when our souls today have to interact with the varied global polycrises, ~~at~~ on a daily basis. Contemporary global challenges like the Ukrainian War, cyber hacking, human trafficking, pathogens being created as bio-weapons, highlight "misplaced priorities" of the world at large.

Paradoxically, this is the very moment that the world needs to find comfort in the "wealth of its Soul", in humanity, peace and hope. But not all is lost. Notwithstanding these challenges, we have monks like Gaur Gopal Das, monk turned entrepreneurs like Jay Shetty, environmental activists like Greta Thunberg, Vandana Shiva and proponents of peace like Malala Yousafzai.

good ✓ steering the beacon light, towards
equanimity, from perpetual conflict.

very
and ✓ However, this is not to
say that material well-being is
not required. Kautilya, in his
Arthashastra had clearly stated that
material well-being is a precursor to
spiritual well-being.

✓ A Soul would be impoverished
if it were deprived of food, much
like if it were deprived of good-deeds.
Hence, "wealth of soul" warrants one
to have the right requisite
prudence and pragmatism, to indulge

in self-care, before charity. This
principle is supported by most
industrialist cum businessmen
turned philanthropists like Warren
Buffet, Jeff Bezos, Ratan Tata and
Azim Premji!

10/10
9+ up

As noted by renowned
philanthropists like Ratan Tata,
nurturing the wealth of soul has
myriad benefits. The "wealth of soul"

has compounding effect in generating
new ideas. For instance, Leila Tenah, an

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immigrant Indian
Indian American born to Indian parents
founded "Sama Source", a business-model
meant to provide employment to educated
individuals residing in slums.

Like Leila Tenah, if we
Indians and the citizens of the world
were to look deeper in self-reflection,
the 21st century would depict a
different picture, as noted by Mano F.
Guillan, in his book "2030". It
could become a world prioritizing "share
economy" over wasteful consumerism. It
would prefer peace over war; Re-oriented
priorities over mindless indulgences.

Thus, understanding and
appreciating one's soul, as one's
true wealth, is no mean feat.
It requires time, patience and
wisdom. It requires one to read
good books, as Rene Descartes had said

That "reading good books is like having a conversation with all wise men of bygone eras".

Similarly, it requires one to listen more and talk less. For, Dalai Lama had said "When we talk, we only repeat what we know. When we listen, we get a chance to learn something new".

Lastly, to appreciate one's soul, one needs to have the courage to experience "Life". As Oscar Wilde had said, "Life is the strictest teacher. It gives the examination first and lessons later". Hence, as Voltaire had beautifully portrayed in his book "Candide", man must never stop nourishing his own garden. Only then can he gain wisdom of understanding his soul's wealth and share it with others.

feels
verbose

Q5 . Democracy, both as an ideal and in practice, will never be draped in the cloak of perfection.

Good
descriptive
hook

C. B. Macpherson, one of the stalwart political scientists on "modern democracy" had said, "The true strength of a democracy can be ascertained from the strength of institutions which it consists of and the dexterity of the people who constitute and elect people to such bodies".

Hence at its very core, democracy has the free will and people's participation of people. Yet it is deemed to be one of the most

contested topics in political science,
both as an ideal and in practice.

Not only is it far from perfection, it
cannot and should not be promoted
as a universal panacea.

In this contextualization,
let us reflect on the essence of
democracy as an ideal versus democracy

in practice. The dream of democracy
conceptualized by former US President Abraham
Lincoln encapsulates "the ideal". He had said,

"Democracy means government of the people,
for the people and by the people". Turkey
serving people's best interest at its core.

However, in practice, the
picture isn't that easy. Winston Churchill
had chastised democracy when he said,

"The best argument against democracy

is a 5-minute conversation with
an average voter". Aristotle, on
the other hand deemed democracy
to be one of the worst forms of
governance, as in practice, it leads to
"mobocracy".

very
well
written

Likewise, both as an ideal
and in practice, democracy suffers
from inherent limitations and is dressed
in the cloak of imperfection. As an
"ideal", ancient Greek philosophers like
Plato and Socrates, and even oriental
philosophers like Kautilya didn't favour
the concept of democracy.

In his book, "The Republic",
Plato argues in favour of an ideal,

Knowledgeable, able ruler in the form of a "Philosopher King", who would lead the society much more efficaciously than democracy.

Socrates too didn't lack the idea of democracy much. Whilst having discourses on the imperfections of democracy, Socrates asked his fellow men to picture a ship full of people stuck in a storm.

In such a situation, would people want a 'doctor' or any other "layman" to be at the ship's control, or would they want an able Captain to steer the ship to safety. Thus, he was against the vice of generalization and lack of expertise of elected representatives.

John Stuart Mill, on the other hand, was concerned with the efficacy of the "flip side of democracy", that is

The expertise of those who would be electing. Despite being a champion of Democracy, he was often known as a "Reluctant Democrat". This is because he believed that as democracy was a hard-earned gift, laymen, uneducated people etcetera, shouldn't be allowed to cast votes. Thus, he propagated the idea of ~~voted~~ weighted-voting in favour of the educated and propertied class.

However these notions regarding the imperfection of democracy as an ideal weren't left uncontested.

For instance, Dr. Amartya Sen had always maintained that "Democracy is conducive to Development". The very

ideal of democracy promotes the notion of masses participating in the electoral process, putting forth their demands and affording an aura of "deliberative democracy". The prolific rise of India, US, South Korea opposed to stagnation of North Korea, are appropriate examples.

This makes one wonder, does the actual practice of democracy suffer from imperfections too? In theory, democracy is meant to uphold Rule of Law and Natural Justice; But in practice, Democracy resembles a "Market place model", where the politicians are the sellers and the nations electorate are the buyers of votes.

Such transactions; at the level of ideology are facilitated by the dichotomous practice of "Majority-Minority Appeasement".

very
appy
analyses

Whereas in practice, it is carried out by illicit distribution of money and liquor, to what scholars like Hannah Arendt refer to as "superfluous masses". Hence, in practice votes are reduced from an instrument of empowerment to that of a mere commodity.

good

Likewise, in practice we see propaganda based electoral campaigning, use of muscle-power and tendencies towards totalitarianism. George Orwell had beautifully depicted the follies of democracy in his book "The Animal Farm", where "though all animals were to be treated as equals", but "some animals were more equal than the others".

Similar incidents are witnessed when violence break out during elections like the West Bengal Panchayat election. Such instances don't only demoralize the democratic ethos of a republic, but they undermine the confidence of the masses in a free, fair electoral system. This coupled with "electoral calculus" being based on identity politics like caste, class etc., hinder growth of political aspirations of a common man to become a President or Prime Minister.

However, notwithstanding all these imperfections, a question we need to ask ourselves is, "Is there a better alternative to Democracy?"

Or better yet, "Is striving for perfection in a mega concept like Democracy, even ideal or feasible?"

Perhaps No. Aristotlean
Virtue Ethics has always promoted
that "Good is better than best" and how
chasing perfection is like chasing a chimera.

Democracy has facilitated human rights
bringing into picture rule-based
global order, institutions like the UN. These
in turn have gifted humanity with UDHR,
International Convention on Civil and Political Rights
etc.

Likewise, it has been
observed that democracies are conducive
to peace. ~~Neither do~~ Democratic
nations ^{rarely} go to war against each other, as
seen post World War-II world order. Rather,
presence of Multi-National Companies, Global

Chains like McDonalds etc., foster loyalty towards economic prosperity and adhesion, rather than disputes.

Last but not the least, despite its imperfections in the form of idea or practice, Democracy affords one the gift of creative freedom, and freedom of choice. From being able to pursue law, medicine, sports, music or dance as a vocation, no girl child would have ever had to go through the ordeal Malala Yousufzai underwent, just to seek education.

However, it would be wrong to push for democracy in every society, in every culture. As argued by economists like Lee-Kuan Yew, the concept of "Asian Values" show

Good ✓

The countries like Singapore and Malaysia, are prone to function better under Authoritarianism rather than Democracy. He gives the example of Chinese rise to as a global economic leader

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contrast

to back his argument. But Dr. Amartya Sen presents the flip-side to this, showing how democracy has aided India to avoid miseries such as famines post 1943, whereas China has 3 famines in the last 50 years.

Thus we see that democracy has its own imperfections. Moreover, as argued by Cultural Relativists like Michael Sanders, democracy is not suited for all communities, as a universal panacea.

But the ethos of democracy
can be hailed as the lesser of other
evils, as a form of governance.

Perhaps, instead of overhauling it, the
system of democracy could undergo reforms.

For instance, the political
parties themselves are undemocratic, and
hence should adopt democratic ideals. Maybe
focus should be on ideological basis rather
than crunching numbers of electoral calculus
and forming political alliances, based on
sole focus on winning.

Hence, the world today
needs to promote democracy at all
levels, be it grassroot levels, women
empowerment in politics, even in
schools and colleges, where a Young Hind
can understand the power he yields being
born in a Democratic Nation. For democracy
varies with it hope, the flame of which can
never get extinguished.