

4. You can change your friends but not your neighbours.

It was just a regular day. Babita taking rapid strides to reach on time to her college. Trying to ignore the catcalls and remarks over her body parts by the youth of neighbourhood. She has complained to her parents and they talked to community elders but failed to bring attitudinal change. In such moments Babita dreams to escape the toxic neighbourhood and be transported to somewhere else. Anywhere but here. But she knows her destiny is cast for worse.

Her story is a microcosm of social, political, economic and international arena where one's neighbours and friends shape one's destiny.

In this essay we will explore what constitute a friend, what does change mean in his/her suspect, why does neighbours considered fixed relative to friends and their implications on an entity or being.

It is said choose your friends wisely and psychologists say that personality of a person is largely a mean of traits of his/her five closest friends. In that respect friends have direct bearing on personality of an individual as well as his/her socioeconomic development.

The change here could mean two things; firstly it may imply that changing friend itself and replacing with other and second bringing change in the friend.

The other component, neighbours are fixed in the location and thereby are not of the choosing of oneself. Even if one gets the choice to place him/herself in a particular neighbourhood one can hardly change that after it.

In a frequently cited example of India's neighbourhood these dimensions are clearly visible. In north & west India faces unstable economy & fragmented politics, in north east hostile china, Eastern myanmar is going through political upheaval after coup and Bangladesh poses challenge in the form of illegal migrants. In such scenario, India can choose friends like USA, Russia or Israel but that doesn't resolve the problems of neighbours.

Similarly a company might be able to choose its business partners, allies and developer friends but its success or failure is also dependent on the business neighbours that is its competitors. The rivals are not of its choosing and can't be modified as per one's bidding.

Friends & neighbour are known to have both facilitative & limiting components for one self. In John Rickford's study of black neighbourhood of America he finds the drug and crime culture in the community is due to lack of disapproval by the peers and community.

A similar study in India finds people are conscious of religion & caste of the person renting their houses. It also finds that Indians overwhelmingly have friends from their own

community. (NSSO Survey 2021).

Taking example of human life cycle where friends do change at different stages of life such as childhood, youth and later years as well as different places such as playmates, for study or pursuing hobby while neighbours are immune to such changes.

further friends are also change friendly through social influence however neighbours are not that conducive to change.

that question arises why do we want to change either of there? for whose benefit we desire such change?

the answer is not one for everyone. for example Mandala theory of Kautilya asks for befriendng the enemy of neighbour to collectively control it. It is for own benefit on the contrary

one may want to change the friend in order to make him quit alcohol. Here the change for his good. And lastly the change may benefit society collectively such as all friends make a pact to stop using polythene bags.

This implication is visible in the story of Angulimala where he had criminal friends and bad neighbours yet by gaining the friendship of Buddha he reformed himself as well as his neighbourhood. therefore, the standards of neighbourhood might have remained same the character of it was changed.

In present context, during peak of covid pandemic, when friends were largely cut off, it was neighbours all one had. Their good nature ~~was~~ or lack of it

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had direct bearing on the community's health and survival. Given that it is immune to change, the social groups which had better neighbours had lesser infections through adhering to the norms and others faced higher infections and mortalities.

Similarly a resident of Delhi might have environmentalists as friends or might change his friend to become friends of environment yet by virtue of being in neighbourhood of polluting neighbours his ~~the~~ polluted outdoors are not going to stop.

By drawing on the above examples it is ~~perfectly~~ visible that friends are of one's choosing but neighbours are not. But that brings to question then what one should do?

various possible responses can be used. first - if changing friend is possible & not neighbour then it becomes important to become friends with neighbours. India's

Gujral Doctrine is a case of its application which says we must provide assistance to our neighbours without seeking quid pro quo. this instills faith in us and generates goodwill in our neighbours.

secondly, we should strive to bring together our neighbours into democratic coalitions such as SMART, village assemblies and group housing society meetings. Here without needing to change the neighbours common good can be achieved. for example community kitchens during covid did not ask

anybody's religion or caste as they rise above the neighbourly factions.

finally, coercive measures can also be used to make the neighbours comply with the norms. for example Taiwan even though can't change its neighbour china but by allying with USA it projects power to maintain its ~~its~~ independence.

To sum up, it is true that friends can be changed easily and neighbours can not. yet change in the character of neighbour is possible. Therefore peaceful coexistence and mutual prosperity can be cultivated anywhere through meaningful engagements. India's look west & Act East initiatives are car in point.

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Coming back to Babita, she one day stopped at the teasing boy's group and talked to them. She told them of her discomfort because of their comments. She offered to make a fresh start where they would not objectify her and treat with respect and she would help them in their studies. This was the beginning of change. Very soon the group idling in the street corner was seen huddled in public library. The neighbours were the same, the people were the same, but something had changed. A sense of community has arrived.

8. Instead of cursing the darkness, light a candle.

Yesterday, during chess olympiad team interviews, Palestinian women team was being interviewed. The interviewer was amazed how despite their innumerable problems and ongoing explosions they managed to become great at chess. 14 years old Nadia thought about it and explained that it is even more important in the time of gloom that someone rise above personal problems and do something that brings hope, brings cheer and brings positivity in the community. Then gradually everybody joins and together they march out to prosperity and happiness.

This event highlights the importance of lighting candle to cut through the darkness

rather than complaining about it.

It is often debated that we are pinnacle of species of Earth but it is unanimously agreed that there is something different about us. we are a problem solver species.

when ice age arrived and food became scarce we did not complain about that rather we cut the stones to make tools, harnessed fire and animal hides to provide protection and did community hunt and thereby flourished. Thousands of other species which instead cursed the period of dark period of cold but did nothing perished.

the question arises why cursing is a inferior response than lighting candle in response to the darkness?

The answer lies in difference between wishful thinking and targeted action. former does not bring change but rather gives heightened realisation of displeasure. In contrast the later alleviates the darkness and alleviate the reason of displeasure.

Corroborating examples of this are spread across history, literature, political, social and environmental domain among others.

Our ancient knowledge system strive us to "Asato ma Sadgamaya, Tamso ma Jyotirgamaya" meaning move from falsehood to truth and from darkness to light. Here the emphasis is on action and not in wishing or cursing the unpleasant.

Similarly, Tagore exhorts us to move alone (EKla chalo Re) if we want to change things but do not find company. He emphasises moving alone is better than

sitting idly together.

one would agree that whatever we celebrate today is outcome of someone's lighting candle in the past. the dark ages of Europe were illuminated by the scientific vigour of renaissance which put stop to witch hunting, opened door to medical discoveries and brought industrial revolution which gave them preeminent status.

In India, similarly, Raja Ram Mohan Roy & Ishwar chandra kindled the fire for women equality, Gandhi illuminated the masses to seek freedom and constitution makers installed a light source which will keep on shining for the guidance of several generations.

A question arises what if we show reluctance to light the candle or not light it at all. what happens then?

Reluctance was shown by Britain and France during 1930s when they followed policy of appeasement to German territorial expansion and acquisition of arms. The results were catastrophic.

Afghanistan chose to not light the candle at all. The result is everyday explosions, veiled women confined to the four walls and religious education displacing scientific education. The result of one step not taken is going back 10 steps in development. Their inaction allowed fundamental forces to install themselves again as the master of their fate.

The beauty of lighting candle is not merely alleviating darkness for oneself. It also shows others the path to light and provides impetus for chain reaction. Soon everyone lights their own candles and every nook & corner becomes bright.

For example darkness of corruption in our country is amply highlighted. The man from Ralegaon Siddhi did not burn and lighted the first candle and in response thousands stopped merely cursing it and soon streets of country filled with people whose minds had the fire to bring change. The outcome was Lokpal Act which would serve even the coming generations.

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At this moment, there are still so many candles waiting for to be lighted such as environmental candle, international peace candle, tolerance candle and brotherhood candle among others. For this individual initiative and collective leadership is needed. Indian mantra of being vishwa guru and showing light to others in these spheres is timely.

At the same time as Gandhi said keeping the house open to allow air from every direction. Similarly we must strive to let the light of knowledge and reform into our Indian abode and benefit from the global Diwali.

Also at the same time we need to educate & nurture our young generation to be the bearer of light and alleviator of darkness.

this can be done by value education, ideal of common brotherhood and inculcating leadership qualities. for when 1.3 billion

simultaneously light the candle, darkness stands no chance.

A song says "mil hi mere tumhara to hi bané Hamare" likewise

when my light and your light and everybody's light has combined it becomes our composite light having different vibrant colors and propels the nation forward by its thrust.