

Undemocratic Leadership Practices and Servile Body Postures

(an article on roots of present day body language practices)

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Abstract:

Healthy leadership practices are essential for success of any democracy. Democracy requires feeling of equality and it is based on this belief that as part of democratic nation, we all are equals and a leader is just one among us. Leaders have to adopt and spread egalitarian culture in order to let the democracy flourish. However, there are many age old practices, which we have inherited from dictatorial cultures. We have to create a democratic culture through careful adoption of appropriate practices. Many unhealthy practices still exist, which stop democracy from spreading. One such practice is the practice of offering oneself to the higher authority showing a very servile body posture. Even the modern day democratically elected leaders exhibit this body posture and spread the undemocratic practice of servitude. This paper traces the history, origin and spread of this unhealthy practice and presents the paper in satirical language. The readers are expected to do minute observations and find similar practices and discourage such practices in their day to day life.

Keywords: leader, body language, democracy, dictator, slave, slavery

Technical words / vernacular words: -

Bhangima = body posture

Sultan = king

Cornish = a body posture in which a person bows 90 degree to show respect

Pybos = here a person kisses shoes of his master and shows his respect towards the master

VIP = Very Important Person (VVIP = Very Very Important Person)

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Body language including body posture is an essential part of communication. It reflects our mind, attitude, overall understanding and our values. This plays an important role in developing or degrading overall organisational culture and climate. It helps or hinders in business negotiations, business deals and strategic summits. Today organisations train and prepare their employees in the art and science of body language. However, many of our modern practices have their roots in the past. This paper traces the origin and rationale of a body posture, which has been in vogue for eight hundred years in India. This body posture and its associated meanings are discussed in details in this article.

You have probably seen many pictures of Prime-Ministers, Chief Ministers, their ministers and officers and other bureaucrats. In these pictures you will see a common thing and that is, a special '*handheld servile Body-posture*' of people standing around the VIPs, In which in front of the VIP (who may be Prime Minister or any Sahib-e-Hukumat) there is to be standing with handheld on their stomach, while expressing an attitude of slavery and anxiety.

Well, this is not a new body-posture, but it has a long history of 800 years in India, this "*hand-held posture*" has a long history. Since the time of Qutbuddin Aibak (*Qutbuddin Aibak ruled over India from 1206 to 1210 and founded the slave dynasty in India*), this body posture has been in vogue. The King (Sultan), who had been slaves earlier, thought this body posture to be the essential posture in their courts. They institutionalised this body posture as they had grown themselves with this body posture in their early life and expected this posture from all their juniors during their reign. When they became kings, the first thing they expected was that everyone should bow before them in their court and shout that the "king is God's representative".

In the middle of the 13th century, the powerful Turk Sultan (king) Balban (*Ghiyasuddin Balban ruled over India from 1266 to 1287*), who himself started his life as a slave, issued a new principle of body posture in his kingdom on the lines of Iran, in which Sultan was supposed to be God's shadow on the earth. In pursuance of this, he strictly implemented "*hand-held servile posture*" When he was slave, he was part of a group of 40 persons, who were good friends. When he became rulers, these 40 persons emerged as leaders. At that time, this group of 40 leaders, was called Chalagani Group", which was companion to Balban and expected egalitarian culture to be implemented. They opposed introduction of this culture initially. However, Balban got them removed one by one and ensured that his opposition is wiped out. He expected everyone to exhibit this posture, even if that person was earlier his friend. Thus this posture was made essential for everyone from slaves to friends to Amirs (rich people who represented nobility). The friends of Balban, Amir, wanted to stay in as friend instead of as servile persons (hand-held posture /Bhangima), in the court, when Balban snatched some of them, and killed his own fellows to ensure compliance of this tradition. He forced everyone to adopt this practice. since then, it has become a tradition in India and it has been followed by both earlier kings and modern day rulers.

In Moghul times (*Moghul Dynasty ruled over India from 1526 to 1540 and from 1555 to 1857*), protocol officers were appointed in the courts, whose work was to teach the newcomers the required body posture and the protocol related to offering of greetings to the King. A special office under a ministerial level officer was assigned this work. The Mughal emperors enhanced obedience requirements further, adding "*cornish*" in it, which means to bow in the 90 degree angle before standing up and kneeling down the hand three times. In order

to connect, some sultans and emperors introduced the system of “*Pybos*” where employees had to kiss the feet of Sultan before standing in this pose (the pose of hand-held on stomach).

When things like ‘*Pybos*’ and ‘*Cornish*’ were being added in required gestures, the 16th-century Afghan Sultan (King) Islam Shah, who was the son of Sher Shah Suri, was very concerned that those who live in Delhi should be blessed with this handiwork. But those people who live in a distant places, they have been deprived of this opportunity so he distributed his shoes in distant places (which are now in Afghanistan). Sultan was a kind and benevolent ruler to send his shoes for worship. All the followers used to touch these shoes and feel blessed.

These traditions have reached our modern democratic courts due to the Turks, Afghanistan, Mughal Darbars and traditional Indian rulers (king), and so modern day democratic institutions still have these un-democratic practices. Even today, the practice of organising 'Durbar Hall' is

indispensable. This court tradition which has now become an integral part of our conduct for 800 years, from Darbar Hall to below tahsil level, so that the hierarchical culture and tradition is still maintained.

Considering these facts and practices, our leaders can be excused. They are also human beings. They have also been part of these practices so it is natural for them to show the instinct to like and propagate these un-democratic practices.

Even today, people are concerned that true democracy is not yet visible. The culture of VVIPs and VIPs and the expectations of survitute is visible all around us. With such rampant practices, it is difficult to visualise the values of equality and it is still a distant dream to visualise egalitarian society.

Nonetheless, I am very happy to think about this fact that the awareness of history among this class of leaders is little less, otherwise it is probable that we would have also witnessed “*Pybos*” and “*Cornish*” besides “*Hand-held body posture*”.

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