

Finding the best in us all

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Nelson Mandela was finally allowed to pass on. In today's world with advanced medicine, the doctors can keep us going beyond our natural life-span, noting, too, that the first successful heart transplant took place in South Africa in 1967, carried out by Dr. Christiaan Barnard, who then passed a milestone in life-extending surgery.

Mandela had for many years suffered from poor health, some of it caused by his 27 years in harsh prison conditions on Robin Island, and some of it just part of life's natural course. Last Thursday, Mandela was allowed 'to go home', at the age of 95.

South Africans and the world are now mourning Mandela's passing, and we are celebrating his life and achievements – and his inspiration to us all, young and old, rich and poor, good and not so good, yes, everyone of us. We have received the mantle to carry on, not only the struggle and hard work, but also the enjoyable things that life offers. Mandela was indeed an extraordinary man, but he was also an ordinary man, as an Asian woman from an NGO said to me after she met him some fifteen years ago. Like everyone else, she regarded him as her role model – because of his integrity and steadfastness, but also his forgiveness and kindness, his practical realism in everyday life and work. He was certainly unique, as were many others, too, in the struggle against South Africa's unjust and perverse apartheid regime.

His wife Graca Machel once said about him in an interview that he was not without fault. Of course not, she said, and added that those who were around him all the time would know that. She didn't want him to be above everyone else. Part of his extraordinary power was exactly the fact that he was also an everyman. That made him human and easier for all of us to identify with, listen to and learn from. We all wanted a part in him, not in the grand way, but in the quiet way, when we struggle with existential and other issues, searching for the right path in the circumstance we live in.

On Tuesday, over one hundred current and former national leaders, heads of state and government, the UN Chief and tens of thousands of ordinary people, attended the memorial service in Johannesburg – some of them indeed great men and women. But there were also leaders who have not done so well, such as President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, and others whose foreign policies Mandela, had been critical of, such as President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair. But they, too, listened to Mandela and admired him as a man and a leader – and they, too, sought to do as well as they could, given the circumstances and conditions they operated in.

Did Mandela make political mistakes? I am sure he did. Better strategies and paths to reduce inequality in South Africa should have been hammered out and implemented much better. True, it is easier said than done. But South Africa is still one of the countries in the world with the highest economic inequalities. As a percentage, few of the poorest are white; they are black. In a large and wealthy land of about sixty million people (and some ten million non-Africans) and an unemployment rate of twenty-five percent, there are major problems that must be solved soon.

Nobody really knows how to change, restructure and revolutionize a land like South Africa, from being a deeply segregated police state based on racial, social, economic and geographical lines, to becoming a more democratic land where everyone has a fair share, not only as regards opportunities, but also as regards results. There are many who have theories and suggestions, not least social scientists. But then politics – and indeed

democracy – is not a science that follows prescribed methods. Social sciences may help, but politics is a process, a practical activity, involving people with changing views, opinions and feelings.

Politics is always a fight for resources, power and influence. And, it is those who have less that must fight for a fairer share. That we must never forget. Nelson Mandela knew that well, and his radical left-wing political conviction, particularly in his youth, tells us that. His vision and objectives were clear. But implementation is unique to each country and time. South Africa is still en route.

Today, I believe the country should move its policies several inches to the left – but then we live in a time when the world would rather adopt more conservative policies. More leftist policies, which I believe would be better for achieving greater equality in South Africa (and in Pakistan), may not be *'realpolitik'* at the moment. Unlike Pakistan, South Africa does still have strong labour unions, and that is a great advantage on the way to achieving greater equality through peaceful means. And greater equality is required for sustainable development and peace.

In his autobiography, *'Long Walk to Freedom'* (1994), Nelson Mandela tells the story of his life and the political struggle against apartheid, until he was freed from the 27 long years in prison in 1990. The then President F.W. de Clark, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mandela in 1993, should also be admired because he finally did the right thing, releasing Mandela and paving the way for his presidency.

Mandela once said after his release that the oppressed blacks had become free, but he added that it was as important note that the white oppressors, too, had become free. As a free man, an icon and president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela had become head of state for everyone in the 'rainbow nation'. Reconciliation and forgiveness became key concepts, also emphasized by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the moral leader and conscience, along with Mandela. His wife from 1958-1994, Winnie Mandela, should also be honoured for keeping the flame burning during her husband's prison decades, and for her achievements in her own right.

Apartheid was a particularly dysfunctional and perverse system of government, which could not be morally justified – the same way as slavery is also impossible to justify. But there are many other forms of injustice that are less visible and clear-cut and therefore more difficult to abolish and eradicate. In Pakistan, too, we find terrible injustices done against women, children, poor people, religious minorities, and other groups.

We should use Mandela's example to fight for justice and dignity for all everywhere in our world. We should note that he, with his 'comrades in arms', have made us all richer as human beings. And it is interesting to realize that in our time, there are also other African leaders how help us to find the right path, such as the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan from Ghana and Professor Wangari Mathai from Kenya, both Nobel Peace Prize Laureates.

The Asian continent – and individual countries, including Pakistan – has fostered great men and women who have taught us to find the best in us all. We continue the long walk to freedom so that all oppressed people of the world can live in greater dignity. The struggle must go on as a collective effort. We must seek practical ways of implementing Mandela's vision and honour his memory. But now, it is the many unknown *Mandelas*, and the *Mandelas* in each of us, that must continue the struggle. Then, in the end, as Martin Luther King Jr. said, we will all be free – free at last.

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