

Defining Freedom

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Freedom in all lands is captive to class interests. It's historically impossible for freedom—freedom of will and of action—to get free from the clutch of its class content as freedom is not class-neutral. Economic content of freedom, moored in class interests, makes it biased, distorts its imagined universal appearance—a concept materialized only in utopia—and creates the need to anchor the concept in the solid base of science instead of a superfluous sand beach of imagination.

Evaluating state of freedom without considering its historical perspective, and to be specific, without considering the dominating class interests in a society, its historical limitations, and its antagonism with contending classes, leads to nowhere but to a circle of confusion, to chattering, inactions or actions without aims or actions without identifying class leadership. The confusing analysis is embraced by dominating interests with a convulsive laughter.

No society was there in human history, where dominating interests had no freedom bridled and compelled to compromise by contending interests only. Dominated interests' freedom was always curtailed, denied, ignored, and muzzled. State of dominated interests' freedom has always depended on the state of the interests' awareness, organization and struggle.

Thus, a polluter has all the freedom to pollute water bodies, ground water, air and soil, a foodster has all the freedom to put toxic substance in food marketed among the masses of people, an ideologue has all the freedom to propagate anti-people ideas, concepts, values, dreams and practices, an educator has all the freedom to instruct with counter-scientific ideas, a publicist has all the freedom to bring out whatever publication the gentle-person likes, an image builder has all the freedom to build up image hollow in essence, a bankster has all the freedom to flog inconsistent ideas, a profiteer has all the freedom to swim in a pool of profit, a section of politicians has all the freedom to deceive public and have a nice life without accountability, and they all have all the freedoms—economic, political, spiritual, etc.—to pool all the resources required to fulfil all their passion. So, there is their near-absolute freedom as absolute freedom is a void in nature and society, an imagination in a society unstable with antagonistic class interests. This process of near-absolute freedom of these interests denies freedom of the interests that stand opposed to them.

Dominated interests have no freedom or limited freedom or theoretically have all the freedom but essentially, practically and functionally have no capacity and mean to meaningfully engage with types of freedom—of expression, speech, etc., economic, political, etc. This reality quashes overwhelmingly propagated universal freedom. Dominated interests can have all their freedom of expression, etc. codified but may not own the time to rest and reflect that can allow the interests access required information, analyze those, identify

impediments to freedoms and tasks to realize those. It's not that always there will be a law banning freedom of expression. A reality bombarded with sort of ideas can keep dominated interests inactive in reflecting and formulating ideas upholding self-interests.

Dominated interests—the poor, the tormented, the working people, the under classes—have all the freedom to live in and live with poverty, ignorance, corruption and deceit for generations, have all the freedom to pass all their “blissful” days without information essential for analysis and survival, have all the freedom to sale their body organ —kidney—for a little cash to those wealthy buyers having all the freedom to fly into Bangladesh from some other country as Monir Moniruzzaman, assistant professor of anthropology at Michigan State University, found in his study “‘Living Cadavers’ in Bangladesh : Bioviolence in the Human Organ Bazaar” (*Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, vol. XXVI, issue 1). In a corner in this strange world, as Reuters reported on March 19, 2012, girls have all the freedom to sale their honor and consume steroids to have a lot of male consumers. Yes, the girls like the girls from erstwhile Soviet Union and eastern Europe are free to earn in a free market, in capitaldom, not in “serfdom”. It's a freedom “bestowed” upon the daughters of destitution. In a place in this world, employers have “the power to deny prescribed birth control pills to any female employee unless she provides proof she's not using it for [...] birth control.” It's the freedom of authority and employer and non-freedom of a section of female employees!

Freedom turns a confusing concept as interests interpret in respective ways. “The first is”, Franklin D Roosevelt said in his message to the US Congress in January 6, 1941, “freedom of speech and expression [...] The second is freedom [...] to worship [...] The third is freedom from want [...] The fourth is freedom from fear [...]”. Thomas Jefferson in his first inaugural address in 1801 mentioned “freedom of religion; freedom of the press, and freedom of persons under the protection of the habeas corpus, [...]”. The Truman Doctrine mentioned “freedom of speech and religion, and freedom from political oppression.” “Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men” was a slogan of the Free Soil Party, antecedent of Abraham Lincoln's Republican Party. To a section in society, cars are synonymous to freedom. To some, types of freedom are the physical freedom, the political freedom, and the mental and spiritual freedom. A section finds two types of freedom : negative and positive freedom. Another section identifies four types of freedom: “Freedom from” or “negative freedom”, “Freedom to” or “positive freedom”, “Autonomy”, and “Freedom from domination”. William D Gairdner classified freedom as Internal Freedom, Self-Freedom, External Freedom (“freedom from...”, “negative freedom”) Political Freedom (“freedom to...”), Collective or “Higher” Freedom (“positive freedom” or “freedom for”) and Spiritual Freedom. (“Six Kinds of Freedom”, July 4, 2006) A classification finds three types of freedom : Freedom 1 : freedom from external impediments (essentially a political concept), Freedom 2 : freedom from internal impediments (usually part of discourse on issues of psychology, personal morality and religion), and Freedom 3 : autonomy and democracy (interpreted in a political sense). Economic freedom is sometimes defined as: “Secure rights to property (legally acquired); Freedom to engage in voluntary transactions, inside and outside a nation's borders; Freedom from governmental control of the terms on which individuals transact;

and Freedom from governmental expropriation of property (e.g., by confiscatory taxation or unanticipated inflation).” (Steve H Hanke and Stephen J K Walters, “Economic Freedom, Prosperity, and Equality: A Survey”, *The Cato Journal*, vol. XVII, no. 2) A section in society perceives freedom as freedom of capital and its kin. Freedom of capital is the essential message Friedrich Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom* and Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom* carry. Assassinating or planning to assassinate statesmen and politicians including Lumumba, Nasser and Castro, as BBC reported on March 17, 2012 (“Licence to Kill: When governments choose to assassinate”), is exercised by a section of dominating interests including Anthony Eden, once a British prime minister, which is part of a political fight waged by the interests, and this political fight is part of the interests’ political freedom. The interests don’t expect and shall not allow exercising the same political freedom by its contending classes. Freedom of “corporate personhood”, of MNCs, and their power to manipulate, encroach and subjugate all public freedoms just wipe out all types of freedom of all, not only of the dominated section of society. A real world tells: Freedom, political, economic, etc. is not universal.

Now-a-days, indicators on freedom are abounding : “Freedom in the World” of the Freedom House, “Democracy Index” of *The Economist*, “Index of Economic Freedom” of *The Wall Street Journal* and The Heritage Foundation, indices of *Reporters Sans Frontiers* and the Canadian Frasier Institute, the Polity data series, claimed to be indirectly of the CIA. Each of these uses varying measures and weight : It’s probably not surprising that The Heritage Foundation and WSJ emphasize on investment and financial freedom in their index. (Lockerz, “A New Use for Freedom Indicators?”, *Democracy & Society*, Sep 27, 2011) Indicators measuring capitalism and political freedom assess degree of capitalism; economic, trade, investment, business, and financial freedom; private investment; competition in domestic banking; competitive markets; lack of interest rate regulation; legally protected private ownership of the means of production; legal enforcement of contracts; price controls; collective bargaining at central level; etc.

Labor shackled to wage, poor mortgaged to misery, common people fettered to destitution, masses sold to servitude are denied entry in freedom. This makes freedom an unspecified, confused concept. Without specifying class character and content of freedom a mere mention of freedom turns into a pretension and prattle only as “something” like universal freedom conceals class freedom and dominant autocracy in all its forms—ideological, political, economic. Exercise of freedom by the masses is completely different from the terms of freedom determined by dominating interests that ignore the fundamental question of class freedom and freedom of humanity.

A flaw will command an analysis of the state of freedom in a society if the analysis completely concentrates on freedom-space granted by dominant interests to the dominated. It is the dominated interests’ awareness, organization, maturity and struggle that ensure its freedom. Yearning for freedom of dominated interests and simultaneously looking up for

freedom-space grants by dominant interests is a foolish, childish, impractical and ineffective aspiration carrying no weight and meaning in political, economic, social and cultural life.

Bangladesh is a bright example. The glorious days of language movement in 1952, of 1969 mass upsurge, the December-days of 1990 are only a few of many examples as ordinary Baangaalees compelled hostile forces to bow down, and the common persons enjoyed freedom to the level they could achieve through their organization and struggle. They had not waited for amplitude of those dominating interests. A despised field marshal and a despised general, Ayub and Yahya, knew it best. The glorious days of 1971, the period the People of Bangladesh organized and waged their Great War of Liberation is an undeniable example of achieving freedom. Noble and crimson bright those days were. People's pain, supreme sacrifice and valor glorified all the freedom-minutes of that long period.

During those valiant periods the dominated section waging struggle and war did not beg freedom, did not appeal to any autocrat, to any donor, did not seek advice from any foreign diplomat, did not hand over the task of defining agenda for freedom to donor driven NGOs, did not mortgage consciences to any group of persons posing wise and claiming civil society. During those days of the glorious war under classes even challenged property relation to some extent in some parts of the country. During those days red with people's blood the masses repudiated retrogressive, sectarian ideas, politics and politicians, and embraced broader, advanced vision.

Only pointing fingers of accusation to this political party or to that party for infringement of freedom-space will carry no practical message if freedom related elementary information are not disseminated among the masses, if people are kept unaware, if imitating and showmanship replaces spade work for organizing people, if the entire task is handed over to non-political appearing political NGOs implementing donor agenda, if soul-searching is replaced by tailing NGOs.

A brief comparison will help assess the state of yearning for freedom of speech, expression, etc.: extent of propaganda by MNCs, and the total number of circulated copies and the number of publications of the political entities standing for freedom of expression, etc.; number of round table, etc. of "non"-political and political entities. Doesn't MNC-propaganda infringe people's freedom of expression, etc.? Aren't issues concerning ecology and climate related to issues concerning freedom and people? Isn't dignity part of freedom? And, hasn't that been demolished by a section of employees of some other country? Similar questions shall confirm nothing but inertia in a significant section of society that tasks itself with the duty of sentinel of freedom.

With this reality isn't it better to have a soul-search before blaming this or that political party, before denouncing this or that part of state machine? This sincere exercise shall carry a message: at spes non fracta, but hope is not yet crushed. □□□