



Being a rebel

■ BY DILEEP RANJEKAR

I have been a rebel right from my childhood.

In fact, my parents saw the early streaks of my rebellious nature when they failed to enrol me in any form of pre-school education, in spite of me having reached the age for it. When I turned six, several attempts were made to get me enrolled in the first standard. Once again I refused. Now I can only imagine how frustrating it must have been for my mother, who had to drag me to school. However, I would still manage to run away from school and reach home before my mother did.

I finally agreed to go to school when I was seven plus years old. Strangely, I never felt the need to go to school. I was able to read and write without going to school and was happy at home, playing, reading stories, flying kites, experimenting with musical instruments, etc.

When I was eight, I refused to undergo the 'sacred thread ceremony' and since my resistance was fairly severe, my father agreed not to force me in doing it. This also partly because, he too did not believe in the ritual.

In terms of education, the family tradition, as established by my elder brother and sister, was graduation, post-graduation and then doctorate in science. Naturally the same was expected from me as well. However, education in general and science education, in particular did not attract me. As luck would be, I did

not get admission into the post-graduate science program, and I happily changed my track. I too got admission in a business management course, something which was not widely popular during those days. In fact, my parents were also not too familiar with this stream of education.

In a family and community where something like a 'registered marriage' was a rarity, way back in 1979, I convinced my family about the simplicity and convenience of such a marriage. And, my parents readily agreed to it when my time came. There were no invitation cards, no presents, no reception and no horoscopes matched at my wedding. Many of my friends and relatives were not even aware of my marriage. Some of my colleagues in the organization came to know of it, only after I applied for a Provident Fund loan to repay the money I had borrowed for the expenses, which was mainly travelling expenses of my family members.

At some point of time, early enough, I realized that my being a rebel was turning problematic. People perceived me as obstinate, a rigid child then an angry young man! At times, I must have come across as arrogant. I did not, however, think of how it would impact other people, their views and their perceptions.

As time passed, I realized that being a rebel was not easy.

If I have to be a genuine rebel, I must focus on what change I want

to bring. For that, I must develop the art and science to create such a change and influence people's thinking in a credible and creative manner. This is a tight rope walk, of not compromising on your principles and yet not adversely affecting the sensitivity of people. Being a rebel needs a lot of application of mind, strategy and meticulous execution of your plan. And for each issue, there is a different plan - there is no one formula that works in all situations.

Being a rebel does not necessarily mean bringing about a revolution in the country or creating some kind of widespread mutiny. It can be reflected in several small and even mundane looking situations.

If someone attempts to break the queue in which I am standing (common case at airports, railway stations, elevators and bus stops), I politely tell that person. I have observed that 75 per cent of the times, the person do get back into the queue. The remaining lot have to be dealt with a slightly raised pitch which will attract the attention of others in the queue and at times, by simply making a request with folded hands. Believe me, it works! One has to try and understand when people do it intentionally and when they do it unmindfully. One must be very soft with people who do it unmindfully and firm where it is wilful.

The other day, I was in a queue for a taxi at the airport and the man ahead of me, took out his cigarette

packet, lighted the cigarette and threw the empty packet on the ground. As a reflex action, I went ahead, picked up the empty packet and put it in the dustbin that was just three feet away. I went closer to the man and whispered, 'what are you doing'? Everyone was watching. The man felt ashamed, looked into my eyes and whispered back, 'I will never do it again'. I quietly returned to my position in the queue. Mission was secretly accomplished. I am confident that this man would never do it again. I did not shout at him, nor did I attempt to put him to shame. In fact, I did his work of putting the packet in the dustbin.

If someone is driving in to a non-entry from the opposite side, I make it a point to stop the vehicle and make him aware, and if possible make the person turn back. Again, there are multiple categories of such people, ranging from ignorance about the 'non-entry' to 'convenience/short-cut' to 'habitual offenders of established law'.

There were/are situations that

compelled me to come back to my rebel mode.

A significant part of my work has involved giving feedback to people about their strengths and also development areas, which in other words mean making people aware of what they are doing well and not doing well. One cannot do this with a rebellious mindset. One has to get into a nurturing, analytical or adult to adult mode. As a father, with my children, I had to be a teacher, a counsellor, a friend or a learner to them during their early life. However, even in the above situations, the rebel in me had to be preserved in not accepting something that is not good for the individual or for the organization/family. However, the way my rebel manifested, would be different each time.

A rebel has to be a fearless person with clear notions. He/she is often needed to be a non-conformist and disagree with what is happening. Every protest has to be supported with reasons. A true rebel has to rebel in mind and not necessarily

physically. A rebel is often a thought leader, who has explicit faith in basic principles of equity, fairness and justice. In other words, if you want certain things to happen in a certain way, you must remember that other people have their own rights, their own ways of thinking and multiplicity of opinions. You cannot approach anything with an attitude of 'my way or the highway'.

Above all, a true rebel ensures that he/she does not come across as a rebel.

Most of us have a rebel inside us. It is important to allow the rebel to express. Rebels have changed the world from time to time or have provided a different direction to mankind. They have questioned the fundamentals and challenged the existing paradigms. Moreover, this world will be a very boring and insipid place to live in, without rebels!



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