

The theory of democracy brings together two powerful needs: individual freedom and collective cohesiveness, a paradox that it tries to resolve.

The word ubuntu, "I am because we are," acknowledges both the individual and the collective and points to the intimate connection of both – they are mutually dependent and each is the progenitor of the other. In other words, a society is made up of individuals and the individual develops a unique personality through interaction with others.

A government based on democratic principles seeks to protect the uniqueness of the individual and at the same time safeguard the conditions for the development of that uniqueness. That means ensuring that the society that it governs is safe, is growing and developing.

And if you understand karma in the way I do, i.e. that existence is paradoxical, you will immediately see that individual freedom is both a threat to and the most powerful agent of social development.

Some individuals become criminals; others become scientists (Scientists are my heroes.)

Both the scientist and the criminal are opportunists; the criminal sees opportunities for exploitation; the scientist sees opportunities for exploration (advancing existence into new and more profound understandings).

Both the criminal and the scientist need an open society; a society that allows a great deal of individual freedom. We have seen how when countries that were once totalitarian begin to adopt democratic principles and allow more individual freedom, they give rise to a mafia of some sort. And in all protests and demonstrations for greater freedom, there is always the criminal element that loots, destroys and even rapes and murders.

In karma there is no dichotomy of good and evil; human beings are both good and evil.

Look how quickly freedom fighters become corrupt politicians. They seize opportunities provided by so-called democratic governance.

When criminals take over government, there is very little individual freedom other than their own.

In societies where there is little individual freedom, there is little progress. Evolution and development depend on the encouragement of individual initiative.

In those societies, where individual initiative is valued, fostered and subsidised, all kinds of new developments arise and in this global world, they spread even into conservative, traditional societies in which there is little individual freedom.

And new technologies carry with them the message of individual freedom. And revolutions are happening because the downtrodden, in countries that suppress individual initiative in favour of conformity, are beginning to break out of confining traditions, spurred on by the subliminal message of individual freedom inherent in technology.

Where populations place the collective ahead of the individual, where individual initiative is stifled because people cannot see that it is individual enterprise that drives progress, we generally have autocratic governments. And autocrats, because they have a conforming society, become criminals. Progress in African countries is slow because we are bound by tradition and seem not to understand the importance of individual freedom and initiative in driving progress.