

UPSC

Essay

(68) Muddy water is the best cleared by leaving it alone. [2025/125m/1000-1200w]

The human mind always wants to do something immediately when a problem comes up. Whenever we see a difficult situation, a sudden emergency, or a chaotic event, our first reaction is to jump in, try to control it, and force a quick solution. However, history and human experience show us a very different truth. There are certain complicated problems where doing too much too fast only makes the situation worse. This deep idea is beautifully explained by the old saying that muddy water is best cleared by leaving it alone. If a person panics and starts stirring a muddy pond with a stick or tries to clean it with their bare hands, the mud gets mixed up even more, and

the water becomes completely dirty. But if that person has the patience to stand completely still and leave water alone, nature takes over, The heavy mud naturally settles down to the bottom on its own, and the water becomes crystal clear again. This is a powerful lesson in patience, showing us that sometimes, choosing not to act is actually the best way to handle a crisis.

To understand this idea in modern life and governance, we must see the difference between being lazy and being patient. Leaving muddy water alone does not mean an administrator should run away from their duty or ignore a dangerous situation like a fire. Instead, it means identifying specific situation where human emotions, angry rumors or public panic have created a temporary storm. In these highly sensitive moments, if the government takes sudden or aggressive action, the public might easily misunderstand it, which

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only adds fuel to the fire. By choosing to wait and watch, a leader allows the initial wave of public anger and confusion to burn itself out over time. Once the emotional excitement cools down, the actual facts of the matter become clear, and everyone can work out a calm, permanent solution. This approach helps control the urge to react instantly and uses the quiet strength of patience, which is an essential quality for anyone running a large and diverse country like India.

In the area of police work, crowd control and keeping law and order, this philosophy is what separates a truly great administrator from an impulsive one. When a sudden rumor spreads or an emotional protest starts in a district, the atmosphere becomes very tense, just like muddy water. If the local police or the district magistrate panics and immediately uses heavy force, like a lathi-charge or shooting,

it usually triggers widespread anger. A small protest can instantly turn into a massive riot that spirals out of control.

A classic example of doing this wrong was the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919. General Dyer used brutal, immediate force to crush a peaceful gathering, which permanently turned the entire country against British rule and sealed the fate of their empire. On the other hand, modern civil servants are trained to be patient. During highly emotional protests, smart officers build a secure boundary, protect public property and simply let the crowd shout and express their anger peacefully for a few hours. As time passes, hunger, tiredness and calm thinking naturally make the crowd go home. The muddy water of public anger settles down without any violence and peaceful talks can finally begin on a clean state.

If we look at international

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relations and global diplomacy, we see that this same strategy of waiting has stopped massive world wars from happening. In international politics, countries often face big provocations, media pressure and angry citizens demanding immediate military attacks. A famous example of leaving muddy water alone was the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 during the Cold War. The United States discovered that Soviet Union was placing nuclear missiles right next to America in Cuba. The American military generals wanted to launch an immediate, massive bombing campaign and invade Cuba. If they had done that, it would have started an instant nuclear world war there.

However, President John F. Kennedy chose to wait. He refused to escalate the military fight immediately. Instead, he set up a naval blockade and gave the Soviet leaders time to think and calm down. By deliberately showing

down the crisis and leaving the tense situation alone for a few days, the emotional panic settled. Secret diplomatic talks opened up behind the scenes, and the Soviet Union peacefully took their missiles back. The world was saved from total destruction because a leader understood that stirring muddy water during an international crisis is deadly.

This same rule of letting things settle naturally is also a big part of how we manage economies and financial markets. Stock markets run heavily on human emotions like fear and greed. When a sudden rumor about a bank failure or a global trade problem hits the market, investors panic. They start selling their stocks very fast and prices crash, creating a major economic storm. In these moments of panic, if the central bank or the government changes its rules every single day out of fear,

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it shows the public that the leadership is scared. This destroys all investor confidence.

Economic history shows that while basic support is necessary, the financial market often fixes itself best when it is left alone to find its natural balance. Investors who panic and sell their shares immediately lose all their money, while those who stay calm and let the market storm pass naturally see their wealth recover completely. Similarly, India's approach during global economic updates has usually been steady and calm. The government avoids sudden, reactionary policy changes and gives its long-term economic reforms enough time to show results on their own.

This philosophy of strategic stillness is also found deep within India's ancient history and cultural traditions, which have guided people for thousands of years. The ancient

philosophy of Daoism talks about a concept called Wu Wei, which simply means "actionless action". It teaches that human beings should learn to flow with the natural rhythm of the world rather than constantly fighting against it with force.

In India's own history, Gautama Buddha taught this exact lesson in a beautiful story. While traveling with his disciples, the Buddha asked his follower Ananda walked over to the stream, he saw that a few bullock carts had just driven through it. The water had become completely muddy, full of dirt and old floating leaves. Ananda went back to the Buddha empty-handed and said the water was too dirty to drink. The Buddha told him to sit quietly for a while and go back later. After a few hours, Ananda went back to the exact same stream. He found that all the mud had naturally traveled down to the bottom,

(5) leaving the water crystal clear. The Buddha smiled and explained that the human mind is just like that stream. When we are disturbed by anger, anxiety or confusion, we do not need to fight it with force. We just need to give it some time, stay quiet and our clarity of thought will return all by itself.

We can see this principle working in modern society as well. True social change and shifts in public thinking happen through slow, natural growth rather than forceful laws. When a government tries to forcefully change an old cultural habit overnight by passing strict, aggressive rules without making people understand first, it faces massive public backlash, protests and anger. This makes the social atmosphere incredibly muddy.

For example, during the emergency period in the 1970s, the government used extreme force to implement family planning

programs. This created widespread fear and massive resistance among the citizens, causing the policy to fail completely. On the other hand, when the government uses gentle explanations, public education and gives society time to understand an idea naturally - like the gradual reduction of social discrimination or the adoption of cleanliness through the Swachh Bharat Mission - the public mindset changes permanently and peacefully. Society needs time to let its old prejudices settle down to the bottom of the pool before it can enjoy the clean water of modern values.

However, using this philosophy in real life requires great wisdom, because an administrator must know exactly when to act and when to stay still. If a house is literally on fire, or if a dangerous medical disease is spreading rapidly through a city, leaving it alone and calling it "patience" is a major administrative failure. Therefore, the rule of muddy water applies strictly to situations that are driven by

(6) temporary emotional overreaction, panic or confusion.

When a young civil servant starts their job in public administration, they are full of high energy and want to fix every single system in their district during the very first week. They try to change old office routines, transfer local staff and disrupt how the local community usually functions. This high level of sudden activity often creates deep friction, irritation and total confusion within the local government system.

A senior, experienced officer knows that it is better to first sit quietly, observe the local setup, understand the historical reasons behind why things are done a certain way, and allow the initial waves of systemic resistance to settle down naturally. By learning the art of purposeful waiting, an officer wins the trust of their staff and the local public. This ensures that when they finally take a step, it is highly accurate, effective and welcomed.

by everyone.

In the end, the philosophy of letting muddy water clear itself is all about emotional maturity, mental strength and humility. It reminds us that human beings cannot control every single variable in the world, and sometimes nature, time and patience are much better problem-solvers than forced action. As India moves forward on its path to becoming a highly developed country, our leaders and policymakers will definitely face complicated institutional crisis, sudden economic updates and intense social debates. In these moments of high national anxiety, we must resist the temptation to make impulsive reactions and short-term choices. By keeping our emotional balance, maintaining the stability of our institutions, and letting the temporary mud of confusion settle through the passage of time, we can ensure that our nation's choices are always guided by absolute clarity, true justice and lasting wisdom.
