

Human Rights in India

By M. J. Audi

The most important Human Rights are: Right to live well, Right to work of one's choice and Right to leisure for creative pursuits. Together they guarantee "Dignity of Human Beings" so rightly stressed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

What is the significance of these three rights? God's precious gift to any person is life. He or she lives it, but once and the span is short. Every person should be able to explore the beauties of life and joys of living. Every person should be able to appreciate and contribute if he can to art, architecture, literature and science. Such contribution is possible only when every person enjoys economic independence and social security. A person that struggles to survive, a person that lives in impure environment, a person that does not know what the morrow has in store for him is not and cannot be a "dignified human being."

Freedom

Democracies cherish certain freedoms as prized possessions. Notable amongst them are freedom of thought, expression and action and freedom to move and to form associations and unions. These freedoms could be effectively exercised only when society has banished poverty. To offer such freedoms to people who are ill-clad, ill-fed and ill-housed is to mock at their plight. A social order which does not provide economic independence for every citizen is always built upon fear. A system built upon fear establishes a servile society. A servile society cannot make any contribution to cultural treasure of the world.

The Founding Fathers were quite aware of the importance of these three rights as could be seen from the chapter on the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution. The Directive Principles direct the State in India to bring these three rights within the reach of each and every Indian. The instructions given to the State vide Articles 37, 39 and 41 are so clear and so precise that they admit no quibbling. What is the performance of the State? How many people enjoy these three rights in India today?

In his famous *Tryst with Destiny* speech, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, said "service of India means the service of the mil-

lions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity". Forty years have come and gone, grandfather has been replaced by grandson as the Prime Minister of India, but poverty, ignorance, disease and inequality of opportunity remain exactly where they were. No political theorisation, no economic rationalisation, no legal excuses and no statistical jugglery can suppress the cruel realities of Indian life. Mahatma Gandhi asserted that to a hungry man even God appears in the form of bread. Bread is not yet within the reach of every Indian. Exploitation of children between four and fourteen is in full swing despite several laws against it. We speak of the brain-drain. With due respect to the brains that leave the country, it must be realized that infinitely superior brains are wasted in the streets of India for want of opportunities. The best years of life of large number of Indians are lost for want of work. The three rights are fully enjoyed by just five per cent of India's population, by a microscopic minority. To the vast majority, to 95 per cent of India's population, Human Rights are only a Bannicide Feast.

What stands between Human Rights and people of India? Empirical evidence indicates that it is her leadership. Fruits of progress made during forty years of freedom are enjoyed by the ruling class, their allies in business, their sycophants in all walks of life and the top brass in various services of the State. In 1940 Gandhiji asserted that the "contrast between the palaces of New Delhi and the miserable hovels of the poor cannot last one day in a free India." How wrong was he! In Swaraj, the contrast has become wider and sharper. Everywhere in India, one sees two life-styles side by side — that of the ruling class and that of the ruled. While the ruled are denied basic amenities, the rulers roll in luxuries.

Servants

Those who hold elected and appointed offices of the State profess to be the "servants of people". Logically and rationally, the "servants" should have only that standard of living enjoyed by the "masters" they serve. In India, the "servants" live in elegantly furnished palaces with sprawling gardens in absolutely clean

surroundings. The "masters" live on footpaths, in the *zoppadpattis*, in the huts, in one or two small rooms in congested and crowded localities surrounded by slums and stagnant pools. While the "masters" cry for water, water flows for twenty-four hours in the residences of "servants" to keep their gardens lush green. The "masters" move like cattle in awful public transport and the "servants" move in chauffer-driven, air-conditioned sleek limousines. Rooms are reserved and locked for free medical treatment to the rulers and their families in public hospitals from where the patients are driven out for want of beds. At the cost of public exchequer the rulers go abroad for medical treatment, but the average Indian cannot get medical attention in his own country. The servants fix for themselves their salaries, allowances and pensions, preferences and priorities, privileges and perquisites, tours and travels in utter disregard to the plight of people whose welfare they profess to serve. Where is "equality in dignity" in India? In the name of "dignity of office" for a few persons, dignity of all human beings is destroyed.

India's leadership in Swaraj is not up to the mark. The leaders are intelligent and competent, but they are not sincere because their words are not matched by their deeds. With such leadership, India will not succeed in eradicating poverty even in the twenty-first century. Without eradication of poverty, without abolition of hypocrisy and without an end to parasitic living by a few at the expense of many, Indians cannot enjoy Human Rights in the true sense of the term.

Dignity

India's resources are quite capable of providing these three rights to every Indian here and now. The wealth of country presently, is pocketed by a few under various pretexts. These pretexts deny "dignity" to human beings in India. Swami Vivekanand reflected on the enhancement of dignity of human beings long before the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Were he living today, the Swamiji's message to his countrymen would be: Arise, awake, abolish hypocrisy and win dignity.