

NON-VIOLENT SOCIETY

WE are living in a world which is full of strife and where violence reigns supreme. How could there be peace in this sense of term? It depends upon our ability in banishing violence and our sincerity in removing the curse of poverty from the face of earth. Gandhiji graphically expressed the plight of poor and their pressing needs. In a controversy with Tagore, he said that the poet "presents to our admiring gaze the beautiful picture of the birds early in the morning singing hymns of praise as they soar into the sky... But the human bird under the Indian sky gets up weaker than when he pretended to retire. For millions it is an eternal vigil or an eternal trance... the hungry millions ask for one poem - invigorating food" and "it is good enough to talk of God when we are sitting here after a nice breakfast and looking forward to a nicer luncheon, but how am I to talk of God to the millions who have to go without two meals a day? To them God can only appear as bread and butter".

Real cause of poverty is exploitation of the needy by the greedy. Every society has enough resources to meet the basic needs of all but it has just distribution. The oases of prosperity that we see in this ocean of misery are built upon the sufferings of millions born in hunger, bred in want and broken in mind. Gandhiji rightly thought that non-violence is the linchpin of sound social order. Sensitive souls care for a society "where individuals grow freely, and where hate and greed and envy die, because there is nothing to nourish them".

World of Exploitation

Today wherever one may be, one lives in the world of exploitation. Different systems of government prevailing in different societies are only different forms of exploitation. On the international stage, a nation exploits the nation; within the nation, person exploits person. From time to time, exploitation changes its shape but never its nature.

First and foremost necessity is to destroy the roots of violence which are always to be found in economic exploitation. As Gandhiji grasped there is "far more *himsa* in the slow torture of men... the starvation and exploitation to which they are subjected out of selfish greed, the wanton humiliation and oppression of the weak and the killing of their self-respect that we witness all around us". Everywhere we find a few persons or a few groups of persons flourishing at the expense of society and masses living in serfdom. Economic exploitation is a global phenomenon. Notwithstanding pedantic polemics, the world is, as Marx found, neatly divided into two classes - the exploiters and the exploited or the rulers and the ruled. The exploiters use every technique to make us believe that the established order is fair and just. But facts repudiate them at every step. It makes no difference whether a society is organised on the basis of private or collective enterprise; a wide gulf separates the ruling class from the ruled. As the ruling class controls the state and uses the force at the command of the state to preserve and promote exploitation, the state is rightly condemned as an engine of oppression.

Exploitation and violence

There are no causes but there is only one cause of violence. It is economic exploitation. The argument that violence begets violence is confusion of thought. It is exploitation that begets violence. Hence, tackling of violence without tackling exploitation is an exercise in futility.

Democratic societies profess liberal or socialist creeds. In these societies, the ruling class controls the state machinery. Whenever its vital interests are at stake, it uses force and calls it "legitimate". All institutions of democratic societies are designed to disguise economic exploitation which is systematic, subtle and invisible. It is also backed and blessed by the brute force at the disposal of the state. The democracies proudly boast of equality before law. Anatole France exposed hypocrisy involved in it when he quipped: "majestic equality of law forbids rich and poor alike to steal bread and to sleep under the bridges". They also take pride in equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity means "the prizes of life should be open to all". For that it should exist in form as well as in fact. As Tawney argued: "its existence depends not merely on the absence of disabilities but on the presence of opportunities goes with the accident of birth and connections. Only

they succeed who have chosen their parents with foresight. Throughout world, relations and connections with the ruling class flourish. Ability and merit languish.

If the exploited react, they are subjugated in the name of law and order. In democracies there is reverence of rule of law. Many learned treatises, exhort the exploited to obey the laws. At times, the exploited, like hunted rabbits, turn and bite. Their bitings are skilfully projected as outbursts of violence and hence a threat to rule of law. What is rule of law? Shorn of camouflage, it is cloak that conceals the violence of exploiters. Twin purposes of law and order are protection of vested interests and suppression of the exploited. The exploited at considered guilty of taking law into their own hands and hence they deserve punishment by the state. Thus violence of exploited becomes the rule of mob and violence of exploiters the rule of law in the democratic societies.

Totalitarian Societies

As regards exploitation, the difference between democratic and totalitarian societies lies only in terminology and not in its essence. It is also only a difference of degree and not of kind. In both types, there is a common concern to keep good life an exclusive preserve of the ruling class. In both types, one finds what Pigou called "glaring inequalities of fortune and opportunity".

Exploitation

The goal of non-violent society is to guarantee work and good things of life to every person. Hence, elimination of exploitation is the first requisite of non-violent society. We should establish "exploitation-free societies" in the world. As Gandhiji said "the principle of non-violence necessitates complete abstention from exploitation in any form". Concrete steps should be taken to free the people from the obsession that "money is the highest of all values". As money is the measuring rod, all professions, occupations and trade become mercenary. It is mankind's misfortune that appetite for money is never satisfied. The more one has, the more one wants and whole exercise invariably ends in exploitation.

The wise men have condemned wealth. Jesus said: "it is easier for camel to pass through eye of the needle than for a rich man to enter kingdom of God". Production's verdict was: "Property is theft". And so thought Gandhiji. "The rich who made his riches by exploitation or other questionable means was no less guilty of robbery than the thief who picked a pocket or broke into a house and committed theft... strictly speaking, all amassing or hoarding of wealth was theft".

The exploiter-culture encourages parasitic living. 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". But in swaraj, the contrast as become greater and sharper. At global level, two distinct life-styles exist side by side. While the ruling class rolls into luxuries, the ruled are struggling for basic amenities.

Economic Equality

Introduction of economic equality is the best means to eliminate economic exploitation. Exploitation and economic inequality are defended as the pillars of progress and prosperity. Inequalities of ranks, conditions and fortunes are justified as attributes of culture and presented as a natural order of things. Plato was the high-priest of inequality. He has a few disciples who hate economic equality as a fabled dog hated his shadow. Rousseau thoroughly exposed the champions of inequality. He pointed out that it is not nature but the society that makes men unequal. All distinctions are purely conventional and therefore alterable, the champions of inequality, Rousseau charged, purposefully ignore fundamental likeness in all persons. They magnify differences and play down similarities to perpetuate revolting distinctions.

Even John Stuart Mill, apostle of individualism, admitted that "a system of institutions which does not make the scale turn in favour of equality... is essentially a bad government—a government for the few, to the injury of the many". Economic equality does not, as its detractors tirelessly repeat, introduce dull uniformity and dead level of mediocrity in the society. It neither freezes the fountain of creativity nor suppresses varieties of mind and taste. In fact, "only in a society marked by economic equality that such varieties were likely to find their full expression". Gandhiji stood for economic



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equality. "Economic equality is the masterkey to non-violent independence. Working for economic equality means..... levelling down of the few rich in whose hands is concentrated the bulk of the nation's wealth on the one hand and a levelling up of the semi-starved naked millions on the other. A non-violent system of governments is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists".

Economic equality is desirable from many angles. It eliminates strife by eliminating privileges and perquisites on one side and disabilities on the other. It guarantees freedom because freedom exists only in the society of equals. As Laski pointed out "Where there are rich and poor.... we find always masters and servants". In a society of unequals, the law supports the claims of the privileged. In a society based upon economic inequality, ideas of freedom and justice are invariably reflections of the interests of the ruling class. Mankind's experience convinces that the worst tyranny is economic tyranny; that the causes of social tensions and political conflicts are always to be found in economic relationship. One agrees with Rousseau that only that is true democracy where "no citizens would be wealthy enough to buy another and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself".

Without economic equality, social and political equalities are simply a farce. The worst drawback of social inequality is snobbery. It is time to admit that all functions are equally useful and their value is also equal. Therefore, none is entitled to income higher than the others. Equality of income is the best method of just distribution. It alone can prevent concentration to wealth in few hands. Gandhiji favoured equality of income. He said "a lawyer's work has the same value as the barber's" and "under ideal conditions, the barrister and the *bhangi* should both get the same payment". In Gandhiji's society "the last is equal to the first or, in other words, no one is to be the first and none the last". Social equality prevails in a society which does not suffer from complexes of superiority and inferiority. Lord Bryce rightly remarked that social equality prevails "where nobody looks up to or looks down upon any one else".

Revolution

Karl Marx was outstanding thinker of revolutionary method. Marx exposed the democratic pretensions of liberal societies. We realize that neither the constitution nor the bill of rights can introduce democracy so long as the levers of economic power are controlled by the ruling class. With all its defects, the "materialistic conception of history" is a convincing analysis of social dynamics. Engels rightly praised Marx for insisting that "mankind must first of all eat and drink, have shelter and clothing, before it can pursue politics, religion, science, art...." Marx explained exploitation by means of his theory of surplus value. He believed in change through violence. His scheme was to seize power and set up the "dictatorship of the proletariat" whose specific mission was to end exploitation and abolish classes. He thought that once classless society is established, the state will lose its *raison d'être* and "wither away". His classless society was to be an association of citizens "in which

free development of each will be the condition of free development of all".

However, the track record of revolutions in setting up the finest social order is disappointing and dismal. Two well-known revolutions - The French Revolution and the Russian Revolution - have not achieved their cherished goal of giving good things of life to every person. As Gandhiji put it "those who have ousted the greedy.... have in their turn become a prey to the disease of the conquered". The condition of masses remains unchanged. In course of time, they bitterly learn that they have exchanged king log for king stork. The exploiters may change but exploitation remains unchanged. Incidentally, the revolution does not devour its children. The children betray the revolution. Revolutions fail because their children turn selfish. Revolutionary leadership proves to be a fiasco of phrases because its words are not matched by its deeds. In 1917, hopes soared high when the Soviets seized power in Russia. The first Marxist state was born. The Soviet Union claims that it has abolished the classes. But the state does not show any inclination to "wither away". It is stated that the "New Class" has sprung up in the Marxist states of various varieties from Beijing to Belgrade. The party bosses, their families and favourites are the real beneficiaries of the Marxist Scheme.

Gandhiji was outstanding thinker of persuasive method. He fervently preached change through non-violence (*ahimsa*). He aimed to end exploitation by means of conversion, by changing the hearts of exploiters. The exploited must be staunch non-violents. Their sufferings as well as their refusal to submit to injustice would change the hearts of exploiters as surely as sunrise in east. Gandhi built up the theory of trusteeship of wealth. Trusteeship allows a person to make as much money as he likes but expects him to use it entirely for public good. The idea of trusteeship was based upon principle from Upanishads - *Tena Tyaktena Bhunjithah* (enjoy by renouncing).

Two sterling qualities of Gandhiji were clear thinking and courage to call spade a spade. Strangely they are not reflected in his theory of trusteeship. Gandhiji consistently stressed the organic connection between end and means and always insisted on the purity of means. Evidence proves beyond doubt that wealth could never be made by pure means. Honesty and riches never go hand in hand. As Shankar Rao Deo observed: "Why first earn crores and then use for society? ... The means of earning crores are bound to be impure; and one who earns crores by impure means cannot be expected to follow the mantra: *Tena Tyaktena Bhunjithah* because in the very process of earning crores by impure means the man's character is bound to be tainted".

Gandhiji contended that if the wealthies were deprived of their wealth by using violence "society will be poorer, for it will lose the gifts of a man who knows how to accumulate wealth". Stark realities of life tell that society ought to discourage such "gifts". Wealth is always fruit of exploitation and "the methods of acquiring wealth are very largely predatory". Knowing this, Gandhiji added a proviso to his contention that in his argument "honesty on the part of the trustee is assumed".

Gandhiji argued that exploitation takes mainly because the cooperation of exploited with the exploit-

ers. The exploitation will end at once if the exploited practise non-cooperation. "The rich cannot accumulate wealth without the cooperation of the poor in society". This was a strange thesis. Exploitation and cooperation are contradiction in terms. It is hunger that forces the exploited to submit to the exploiters against their will.

Heart-melting sufferings of the exploited do not lead to heart-searching by the exploiters. How then could there be a change of heart? Surely, Gandhiji knew that it is as difficult for the exploiters to change their hearts as it is for the leopard to change his spots. In short, the persuasive method cannot ameliorate the conditions of exploited. Instead of eliminating, the persuasive method sanctifies exploitation.

Direct Action

Though the diagnosis of Marx and Gandhiji was accurate, their prescriptions have failed to eliminate exploitation. That reform and revolution cannot deliver the goods is the lesson of history. Hope lies in direct action by the people themselves. The people should not tie their fate to the apron-strings of leadership. People should use force not to kill the exploiters but only to take away from them the fruits of exploitation. Under no circumstances people will use force for inflicting physical tortures or for physical liquidation of the exploiters. People's use of force would be strictly and exclusively confined to restore to the society the wealth which rightly belongs to the society and to use that wealth for the benefit of each and every person in that society. Wealth, after all, is the outcome of the resources and labour of the whole community. It should never be allowed to be pocketed by a few. Such use of force is morally and rationally justified. Gandhiji himself visualized it. He said: "I would be very happy if the people concerned behave as trustees but if they fail I believe we shall have to deprive them of their possession through the state with the minimum exercise of violence".

It could, therefore, be concluded that without the establishment of economic equality, exploitation cannot be eliminated. So long as exploitation continues, non-violent society will always remain a dream and violence will always be a reality.

The Go

KUMBAR derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kumbhakars' means a pot maker. But Goan 'Kumbars' are more than makers of mere pitchers, vases, flower pots and cooking utensils. They have ventured beyond these utilitarian items to create artistic statues, wall pieces and other decoration items, lending a touch of art and finesse to the profession of pottery making by their skill and imagination.

In Goa, few among the lowly enjoy as many ceremonial privileges as the potters. At the Kamakshi Temple in Siroda a potter from

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a nearby Raia village lights the first lamp of the maha-jatra. These potters have even the right to supply all the divas required for the day. According to a legend it is believed that during the Portuguese regime, one of the potters had saved the diety from destruction at the hands of Portuguese zealots. It is said that when the village of Raia was devastated by the soldiers, the high caste Hindus fled but a potter stayed back. Later he took the diety across the river to Siroda, in the dead of the night. As a reward to his bravery and courage, the Hindu community and the Mahajans granted the valiant potter the heritable right to light the first diva.

Among the pottery making centres in Goa, Bicholim, which is near Maharashtra border, takes the lead. Here clay modelling exists in almost every household. The Bicholim potters are traditional makers of idols.

Clay, which is found in plenty in the neighbourhood is used for terracotta. It is mixed with water to make a semi-liquid creamy state. At this stage it is called slip which is put into plaster of paris moulds. The moulds are opened immediately. Then come the cleaning stage where the piece is trimmed off extra particles very carefully. It is a laborious job as the wet clay object can easily break. It is also at this stage that luting is done, which in ordinary parlance means cementing together parts of an object with wet clay. Thus a moulded statue of nut cracker has a coconut and a knife joined to the hands by luting. These additional objects are moulded by