

GANDHI MARG – FIVE

EDITORIAL

POLITICS OF SERVICE VERSUS POLITICS OF POWER

It has been said that even good men and women remember God only a times of adversity and forget Him when the going is good. Such an attitude can be criticized as opportunist. If we look at this a little more kindly it can well appear somewhat natural. When life is happy and carefree divine providence becomes immanent in life. It is inherent even if not apparent. When individuals and groups face tragedies and groups face tragedies and travail they cry out to God for protection and support. This is because God is the refuge of those beaten down and in suffering. This explanation is not meant to defend any opportunist attitude in this regard. It is just an explanation of a human problem.

In the early years of Indian independence, with Mahatma Gandhi gone, people in their exuberance of new-found freedom went merrily on forgetting the Master. There also came occasions when we not only deviated from the path he had indicated but even took pride in thinking that some of us were wiser than him. We do not wish to quarrel with what happened. When tragedies occurred and we were confronted with growing violence all around and the deepening of the gulf between the haves and have-nots, the memory of the Master began creeping back into our minds. We passed through moments of introspection. These were, however, short and fleeting and we sank back into renewed forgetfulness. This happened often in the last 25 years. But more than anyone else, two of India's greatest men after Gandhi, again and again recalled us to the basic value which had flowed from the life, work and death of Gandhi. These were Pandit Nehru and Acharya Vinoba. Their fields of action were utterly different from each other. But what they did was inevitably and in essence complementary. Pandit Nehru was the Prime Minister, concerned with government, the functions of government and, in spite of all difficulties, with finding for India a place in the modern world. Acharya Vinoba turned away completely from government and applied the strategy of nonviolence in a crucial field of economic transformation, i.e. the voluntary redistribution of land among the landless millions. Land hunger has been at the root of many revolutions in the world and if India has not had a blood bath in this regard, we must bow our heads in reverence to that gentlest of our saints who walked from one end of India to the other meeting millions of people face to face and pleading that those who had more land should part with some of it voluntarily to those who had no land at all. In any other country in the world such a silent revolution through consent would have been hailed as one of the miracles of history and any nation would have been proud of whatever was achieved in this regard. And yet the Bhoodan Gramdan movement did not achieve its aim and became riddled with illusions and errors. Pandit Nehru, on the other hand, tried valiantly to build up an image of India still reflecting the moral and spiritual values of Gandhi in Indian politics, and at the same time to modernize the country. Pandit Nehru's Herculean endeavour to rebuild Indian politics on such a firm and moral foundation achieved only partial success. Very few people have the capacity to consider the might-have-beens of history. In the present case very few people are capable of thinking what would have happened in India without the vital and complementary leadership of both Acharya Vinoba and Pandit Nehru. People who just do nothing or have completely failed in the Gandhian

tasks they had undertaken, can easily throw stones at both Vinoba and Nehru. But this will not touch their essential greatness which will remain enshrined in history.

It is against this background that we shall make an attempt to assess some of the realities which confront India. The first thing that strikes like a terrific blow on our minds is the crisis of character which has overtaken almost every section of our people. The politician, the government servant, the industrialist, the labourer, the peasant and even the social and constructive worker have all come under this blight. Is it enough to say that in the history of a nation the rise and fall of character follow like waves, one after the other, with imperative frequency? This will be poor consolation. Even at high levels, Indian politics has become terribly corrupt and shamelessly opportunist. Political leaders who hold on to vital foundations of moral values are still there on the Indian scene but they are few and far between. They have, however, failed to infect their followers with their own sense of integrity. What has happened in Andhra, in Bihar, in U.P. and Gujarat, are tragic reminders that political opportunism has infected all levels of the Congress. The Gandhian era in Indian politics was almost wholly one of the politics of service. Even if Gandhi did not use the picturesque and magnificent phrases of Winston Churchill, he also made it clear that his politics were those of sweat, toil and suffering. He had nothing to offer to those who stood with him except the prison and the bullet-and yet millions rallied to his trumpet call, recking no consequence too dear in facing every challenge of brutality from the British who held India in subjection. Today politics has mostly become carrot-chasing by those greedy for any crumbs of power or money. There are many constitutional steps that can be taken to minimize political opportunism and chicanery. As for instance, the proposed legislation to prevent elected members from crossing the floor by making it imperative that such people should resign and seek a fresh verdict from the electorate. No member of any legislature crossing the floor should be rewarded with high office of any kind. We should make it clear beyond doubt that the nation will treat with contempt such 'ayarams and gayarams'. Most of our political corruption stems from this basic depravity of those seeking power or money at any cost. It is not enough that our leaders furnish political leadership. They must also furnish moral leadership which the people will instinctively understand and value. There are only very few persons in the Congress today to build up real mass contact and recalling to the people the challenges of social and constructive service. The political machinery is almost wholly that of vote catching. When any political party reduces itself to a vote-catching machine it is a doomed party. While thus on the one hand political leaders of all parties have turned away from social and constructive work, constructive workers on the other hand have turned away completely from all political action. Both these attitudes are fatal. A way must be found to combine political and constructive work, taking all the necessary safeguards to prevent such unity of action degrading itself in the manner of present-day politics. On the one hand, we subject political leaders to every kind of inquisition and on the other let them play the devil with character and money. This is a strange paradox. On the one hand we attempt character assassinations and on the other let many an evil doer get off with it. To completely divorce social and constructive work from political work is to hand over power to charlatans.

There are many other relevant matters to which one can refer. But we wish to stress in this essay the paramount need to face up to the present grave and alarming crisis of character. There are no easy remedies. Everyone must re-emphasize the politics of service without treating politics itself as dirt. Politics is only as dirty as we make it. The politics of

Gandhi, Nehru, Sardar Patel, Rajendra Prasad, Chittaranjan Das, Lajpatrai and Rajaji were not dirty politics but something which elevated and purified politics. Gandhi daringly used the phrase 'spiritualizing politics', something unheard of till he arrived on the political scene. Some of our best leaders even while in politics must set the example of simple and high living and give genuine moral leadership. Authentic political leaders should join hands with authentic social and constructive workers standing for truth and nonviolence in every sphere of action. We must rouse the people once again to bring together political action and service action, into an integrated national movement. It is not easy to draw up the blueprint of such a program. It is for us all however to give thought to this matter, confer together and arrive at high-minded and practical solutions.

G. RAMACHANDRAN

EDITORIAL

THE YET LINGERING CURSE

This is the curse of untouchability in India. It is an ancient curse. But somehow it has persisted through uncounted centuries poisoning and corroding life in India. This proves how deep the roots of untouchability have penetrated into the life of our people. Untouchability, however, is only the diabolic symptom of a fatal disease in the blood and bone of India. That disease is the caste system. We are sometimes inclined to look back into the ancient past and remember the concept of varnashrama dharma on which our society was structured, on the four broad divisions of brahmana, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra, and beyond them the no-man's unchartered vistas in which lived the panchamas. The panchamas were the untouchables. But as the broad stream of these four divisions of society rolled down the pathways of time, they broke up into hundreds of water-tight compartments, in each of which life was held in prison and which thus stagnated and putrefied. The result is the present caste system; and the roots of untouchability are deep down in that system.

It is some consolation to recall that from time to time great moral and spiritual giants broke through the iron walls of the caste system and held aloft the philosophy of love, compassion and equality for all men. We had first the Buddha who admitted the panchama into the Sangha and thus delivered a mighty blow on the caste system. From the Buddha to Gandhi we have had an unbroken chain of saints and sages who held out their hands to the untouchables. Among them, Ramanuja was perhaps the most courageous and uncompromising. He risked his life for the emancipation of the untouchable. But all these great masters, with only a conspicuous difference in the case of Gandhi, have come and gone; and yet the caste system, along with the curse of untouchability, still survives in India. Even in this year of grace 1973 the poison of untouchability erupts again and again.

Why do we say there was a difference in the case of Gandhi? While other great teachers held out their hands to uplift the untouchables, Gandhi identified himself with them completely. He did not merely preach the doctrine of compassion but made the whole of his life embody that compassion in practice. When he adopted a little pariah girl as his own daughter and brought the child and laid it on the lap of his wife, who had only four sons and

no daughter, a shudder went through caste-ridden India. Gandhi risked his life again and again when he organized a mass movement for Harijan liberation. With Gandhi this was not a political issue but a moral and spiritual one under which no one in India could accept untouchability and still call himself a Hindu. Gandhi's aim was not individual purification but the purification of a whole people and their religion. Because of his colossal moral authority and organizing ability millions of Hindus stood with him and acted with him. That was how temples were opened to the Harijans and how drastic legislation was enacted by Parliament and states' legislatures, removing every legal bar impeding the fullest justice and equality to Harijans. The Harijans now have full and adequate representation in Parliament and the legislatures. They are a power to be reckoned with in the India of today. The higher castes and the political parties are all now courting their support. And yet, alas, the caste system still prevails and untouchability poisons the life of our people.

Long ago there was an illuminating controversy between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Gandhi now stands out in history as the saviour of the Harijans and Ambedkar will always be remembered as the dauntless champion of the untouchables. Ambedkar told Gandhi that it was no use fighting untouchability alone but that the battle must be a straight and relentless one against the caste system itself. His words were: 'As long as there is caste, there will be the outcaste, i.e., the untouchable.' Gandhi's answer was equally prophetic when he said that the whole caste system was nothing but one of graded untouchability, from the brahmana down to the shudra, and that if the ultimate of untouchability affecting millions of untouchables was destroyed the whole caste system would crumble like a house of cards. Both were right. Ambedkar was right in theory. Gandhi's task, however, was not to pronounce a theory however correct but to go into battle, taking millions with him, against untouchability. Untouchability was the highest common factor of evil and in the fight against it Gandhi succeeded in marshalling every section of the people. He thus enlisted without explicit commitment these millions in a battle against the caste system also.

When the upper castes joined in the struggle against untouchability, it became imperative that they moved away progressively from the caste system. The writer has personally witnessed this phenomenon in innumerable situations as the Harijan liberation movement gathered strength under the mighty leadership of Gandhi. The battle against untouchability released unforeseen moral forces in the country which were later harnessed in a straight battle against the caste system. Gandhi asked not for concessions to the untouchables but for atonement by the so-called high castes. The only atonement he prescribed was identification with the Harijans and a complete social integration between the upper castes and the untouchables. Unique transformations of character and outlook emerged in the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, ushering in a new climate of hope and fulfillment for the Harijans.

And yet why is the caste system still with us and why is untouchability raising its poisonous hood so often in our country? This is the question we must answer without any equivocation. We cheated the Buddha and Ramanuja and in our own time we have outwitted Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda and Shri Narayana Guru of Kerala. Are we engaged in the process of betraying Gandhi also? The truth of the matter is we cannot betray Gandhi. He is unbetrayable as he symbolized the truth of this cause. Harijan liberation is no longer a question mark. It is a reality. It has yet to be completed. We have

no doubt it will be completed. But before that happens we have to do many things. We are doing some of them but not all.

The first thing to be made clear beyond the shadow of a doubt is that the future of the Harijans now lies own hands. They must develop more courage, determination and organizing ability. They must stand together as one man throughout India and insist on their rights. They have secured many rights but they must go forward and secure all the rest. This includes not only political, economic and educational rights but the right to have the door open for their complete integration with the rest of Indian society. Every taboo against social intercourse and integration must be removed by law and practice. Perhaps the Government is doing its duty more than the people. In the struggles for the capture of political power people have forgotten the basic challenges of nation building, among which the fullest liberation of the untouchables is the most vital. The upper castes will not be able to maintain the citadels of the caste system much longer. The time is therefore ripe for the Harijans to move forward in their last-ditch battle to liberate themselves completely. There are no insurmountable obstacles. Every Harijan chilled must be brought up in an awareness of his complete equality within the Republic of India. Perhaps the Harijans are waiting for a leader outside Government, who will not be swayed either by the goodwill of the Government or the illwill of the upper castes. We need today a leader of the Harijans from the Harijans and for the Harijans. Unfortunately the most outstanding among our Harijan leaders are inside Government and preoccupied with many other issues. We do not have even a Cabinet Minister for completing the steps needed to achieve the fullest liberation of the Harijans.

While thus the Harijans must strive for themselves with relentless courage and determination, there is a solemn duty cast on the other Hindu sections. We also need a valiant caste-breaking leader to emerge from them. Gandhi's greatest contribution against untouchability and caste came from his moral leadership. After Gandhi our most outstanding non-official leaders have been Acharya Vinoba and Jayaprakash Narayan. Neither of them has picked up the gauntlet against the caste system for a battle unto death to destroy this all-corroding evil. They have, of course, spoken and written against the evil but this has made no dent on it. At the moment the voice of Mrs Indira Gandhi is the most strident and compelling in this cause.

Recently the Sarva Seva Sangh held a notable conference in Sevagram. But nothing has emerged from it of any significance in this war against the caste system. There can be no Sarvodaya with the caste system existing in society. Sarvodaya and caste are contradictory terms and yet we do not know how many of the Sarvodaya leaders and workers themselves are completely free from this poison. Socialism and the caste system can never coexist together. One must defeat the other. Democracy can never function when caste decides the voting. Poverty is also inextricably mixed with the caste system. The lower the caste the greater the poverty. All this is known to everybody. Everyone knows but few really care. That is the tragedy of the situation. The total eradication of caste and the consequent disappearance of untouchability depend on the character of the Indian people. It is at this point that we realize the heart-breaking ruth that character has seldom been weaker in India than it is today. But we must not despair. Each one of us must do our best. No one can do better than his best. We must go on striving without defeat. We must gather together those who stand with us and offer unyielding and continuous battle. We will certainly win because

history is with us and the changing conditions of Indian and world society are with us. Let us therefore keep our courage, effort and hope alive and kicking hard.

G. RAMACHANDRAN

EDITORIAL

THE TRAGEDY OF INDIAN EDUCATION

When I remember that this Vidyapith is the only University personally founded by Mahatma Gandhi himself, I stand here overwhelmed by the memory of the Master who through an unbroken period of fifty years served India and mankind with a passion, courage, devotion and selfless ness unequalled in our history. He touched, purified, enriched and strengthened the life of the Indian people at every point. His aim in all that he thought, spoke and did was made as clear as crystal by himself. What he spoke and wrote are now preserved in innumerable volumes allowing none of us to run away from what he meant. His aim was without a doubt the creation of a human society of complete political and economic justice to every man and woman at every level of life. Such total justice was to be achieved though the active and resistant nonviolence of the common people. To ensure such nonviolence and to train every citizen in it, he gave India his Constructive Program of day-to-day work in many directions. Once achieved the New Society was to be maintained through nonviolent sanctions by the people who would have discovered for themselves the power of nonviolence. He insisted that what was needed was the nonviolence of the strong to be practiced individually and collectively. He proved within his own lifetime that collective nonviolence built on the foundation of individual nonviolence could become an irresistible avalanche of power capable of uprooting every tyranny. He called the society of his dream 'Sarvodaya'. Sarvodaya was the goal and Satyagraha the means of attaining and preserving it.

We have in the world today many political and economic systems competing with one another for the mind of man. These have arisen in response to the challenges of history in different lands and under different climes. We have no quarrel with any of these. We try to understand them and to find out what might be beneficent in them for human society. But those who have tried to understand Gandhi and also to carry out his ideas in practice, firmly hold that never before did mankind come to possess a nobler and fuller concept of political and economic democracy than Sarvodaya, and that Satyagraha as the method to achieve it is a more practical and rewarding kind of revolution than any other. Satyagraha is not merely a nonviolent battle but equally a continuous participation in the Constructive Program. The Constructive Program under Gandhi was the training of the citizen in nonviolence. These are not new ideas at all in our country but well known to most of our people.

The question therefore naturally arises if this University which Gandhi founded is alive and vibrant with the concept of Sarvodaya and the training of the satyagrahi. Will the young men and women who are students of the Gujarat Vidyapith become in one way or another concrete workers in this magnificent program of human redemption in India?

These young men and women will of course have to fit into the many professions and tasks of daily life and nation-building. This will be natural and proper. But even so, will they bear their share of the task of creating a Sarvodaya Society through nonviolent means? Let me make it clear that I am not at all suggesting that students of this University must or will become full-time missionaries in this great enterprise. Most of them will become normal professional men and women and even non-professionals in different walks of life. It can happen that a small fraction of them might become missionaries of Sarvodaya and Satyagraha. They will certainly be the salt of the earth in this land of ours. But let us not forget that, not these few only but even more the normal lives of millions of men and women furnish the instruments of such social transformation. Take for instance the concepts and practices of democracy. These are sustained by millions of men and women in different countries who work for and vote for democracy even while engaged in the countless normal daily tasks of life. They are able to do so because of their firm allegiance to and faith in the democratic process. If it can be said that those who pass out from this University are consciously and courageously lending a hand, wherever they are and whatever they do otherwise, to establish the Sarvodaya order of society and to strengthen the fibre of nonviolence in the people amongst whom they live, then indeed this University will stand justified in the eyes of India and the world. I make bold in stressing this because there are not many institutions in this country dedicated to the twin ideals of Sarvodaya and Satyagraha. Is a careful and continuous study, suited to appropriate levels, going on to make clear to the students the tremendous implications of Sarvodaya and Satyagraha? It is my conviction that the more we study the history of democracy in our world the more it will become clear that Sarvodaya is the latest and most dynamic concretization of the democratic process. Equally, that Satyagraha is the most modern and practical methods of revolution. The understanding of this must run like a golden thread through all our education.

Far away in South India in Tamilnadu there is an undeclared Rural University, viz, Gandhigram, with nearly three thousand resident students, teachers and workers in a three-hundred-acre campus. Your revered Chancellor, Shri Morarji Desai, came to Gandhigram on my invitation and delivered the Convocation Address of that year. We have always cherished the memory and inspiration of his visit and address. As the Director of Gandhigram for many years, I know how difficult it is for any Institution of Higher Education to stand for Sarvodaya and Satyagraha without reservation and yet give the students the academic disciplines and attainments without which no University can function today. We have to make compromises if we are not to be shunted out of the mainstream of education as it sweeps over the country. We have also to take care that our students are not isolated from the rest of the student community and they are not looked upon simply as curiosities in the educational world. But at the same time if we make any compromise at the cost of our basic ideals and practices in the line of Gandhi, then whatever else we do will become nothing more than an imitation of current education, with some questionable and weak Gandhian trappings and externalities. Our own special experiments in Gandhian education cannot succeed in isolation and that is why we have to deliver frontal attacks on the system of education current in India and transform it in our direction. Our experience in Gandhigram and perhaps yours here in the Gujarat Vidyapith are identical in this regard.

Every political and economic revolution worth the name can conserve its new values and develop them only on the foundations of an educational revolution. After the French political revolution, France revolutionized its educational system. The same thing happened in the United States after they broke away from the British Empire. Nothing is more

conspicuous in the U.S.S.R. than their educational revolution. This is even truer in present-day Communist China. Gandhi also sought to bring about an educational revolution in India. Having been closely associated for a quarter of a century with this educational revolution in India, I am compelled to ask the question how far we are today standing steadfastly by the basic ideas and methods of Gandhian education. The Master himself called it Basic Education and in its wider sweep he gave it the name 'Nai Talim'. There was nothing mystic or static about 'Nai Talim'. Basic Education was simply revolutionized Elementary education. Later at the High School level it became Post-Basic Education. Later still it was moving upward bearing the same ideals and methods towards the University level.

What Gandhi endeavoured to achieve is no longer a secret. He wanted productive work and academic learning to be brought together into one integrated educational program. Even as boys and girls begin to learn the three Rs etc. they should also begin productive work in the appropriate and the elementary beginnings. And just as learning different subjects would advance from year to year, so should productive work also advance step by step. It is now widely admitted that this is basically a very sound and modern idea. That education should also come from work-experience and not simply from books is not now disputed by anybody in the educational world. Academic learning alone is not enough. Productive work alone is not enough. Both must be put together. This alone will ensure genuine education to the children of the farmer and the labourer as equally to the children of the well-to-do classes. Such an educational system would also have incalculable social consequences by leveling down disparities and inequalities in society. Unfortunately certain rigidities entered into the system making it inelastic and even unreal. From then on Basic Education weakened from within. There were of course attempts to weaken it from outside by those who were involved too deeply in the traditional system of education in our country. Neither the Central nor the State Governments did all that was needed to build up Basic Education. This resulted in Basic Education getting confined to a few isolated pockets and the people themselves were not sure in their minds about the undoubted advantages of Gandhian education. There were many years of drift and vacillation.

Then came the appointment of the Education Commission by the Government of India in the full tide of Indian independence. That Commission had on it distinguished educationists from India and abroad. It produced a very remarkable report. As a theoretical and authoritative document on education there is hardly anything to equal it. The Report gave the highest praise to Basic Education and insisted that the spirit and practices of Basic Education should no longer be confined to Elementary Education but should permeate the whole of education from the primary stage to the University.