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VOL. II

THE IDEAL OF  
INDIAN WOMANHOOD

BY  
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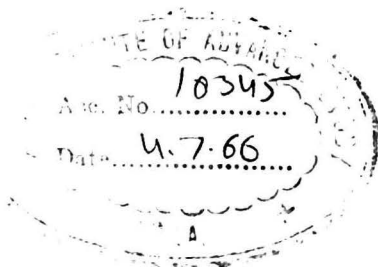
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## PREFACE

For introducing this second volume of my prison memoirs I have very little to add to the preface to the first volume. It is said there that these memoirs are not biographical essays. They are random notes made over a number of years as the memorandum of reflections on a variety of subjects. The incentive for the reflections always came from the scrappy news of some event outside the jail. The essay which provides the title of this volume is bound to provoke controversy. It will be fruitful if it leads to a dispassionate scientific examination of the complicated sociological and ethical problems stated and briefly treated in the essay. I only tried to prove the historical necessity for a revaluation of traditional values.

The rest of this volume records observations on current events, and is rather fragmentary. But these random notes are expected to serve the purpose of refreshing the memory of readers, and they may consequently have a different view of men and

things. Risking unpopularity, I have done some lie-hunting which gives myself satisfaction, even if it may not serve any other purpose. I can only hope that some readers will share the satisfaction.

Dehradun, July 1941. .

**M. N. ROY**

## The Ideal of Indian Womanhood

Ours is an overpopulated country—in the sense that probably it has the highest birth-rate. Reliable statistical data are practically absent. The vast bulk of the population do not keep any record of births. Yet, a very high rate of births is clearly indicated by the rapid increase of population. As a matter of fact, the net increase of population is not the true indicator of the actual rate of births. The ratio is much greater. Because, the high birth-rate is more than counter-balanced by the still higher rate of infant mortality. On the whole, the death-rate is higher in India than in the economically more advanced countries. Still, her population has been increasing fast enough. That means an extraordinarily high birth-rate.

That creates the baffling problem of population. The poverty of the masses lies at

the root of the problem. It is the primary cause of the comparative largeness of the incidents of births as well as of deaths. The cause of the birth of too many children is to be traced in the cultural backwardness of the masses which, in its turn, is determined by their economic conditions. On the other hand, about fifty per cent of the first-born children die soon after birth, and infant mortality is generally so high because of the physical deterioration of the masses due to chronic malnutrition.

Cultural backwardness—the absence of the understanding of the most elementary principles of hygiene and sanitation—also plays its part in the tragic drama. But that again is the dire result of economic stagnation and deterioration. There is a high rate of mortality even among those children who do not die either at birth or soon afterwards,—the foredoomed fifty per cent. That is largely due to the parents' inability to procure even the most minimum quantity of the requisite alimentation. The want of medical aid is a contributing cause.

All these dismal facts raise the question whether the practice of birth-control could

not be advantageously introduced in India. Of course, it goes without saying that the device could possibly serve only as a temporary remedy for relieving the distress, particularly of the modern educated middle-class. The practice cannot be wide-spread in this country. To realise the necessity of birth-control and to practise it hygienically, the woman must attain a minimum level of modern education and general culture. That condition is absent in the case of the vast bulk of Indian womanhood. The multitude of them perform the process of reproduction almost like animals. Sex-intercourse is practised as a matter of habit, and even as a duty. Children are born at random. They are brought into this world without any sense of responsibility on the part of the parents. If some die at birth or soon afterwards, others follow directly. The standing tragedy is regarded as a freak of fate. The belief in fate or in the Will of God precludes the realisation of the sense of responsibility which alone could introduce intelligence in the habit of procreating.

At the other end of the social pole, there is no necessity for controlling the birth-rate

*artificially*. With the rich, in the position to have varied interests in life, the birth-rate is automatically controlled. Even those who can well afford to bring up any number of children, as a rule, have only a few. This is so particularly among the well-to-do, with modern education and culture. There are various reasons for this apparently paradoxical phenomenon, the main being *unconscious* practice of birth-control. It results automatically from the mode of life of the educated and cultured rich.

The more cultured a nation, the lower the birth-rate. That is an empirical fact of sociology. France, for example, has the lowest birth-rate. In England as well as in the U. S. A., it is on the decline. In contrast, Italy has the highest birth-rate in Europe. Even before Mussolini introduced the practice of raising cannon-fodder *en masse*, the Italian peasant woman was famed for her fecundity. Before the war, when the vast bulk of German women practised the prescribed virtues of the "hausfrau", the Kaiser could count upon a plentiful supply of soldiers.

The situation changed after the war. The

social emancipation and cultural development of the post-war generation of German women were amazing. There was a revolution in the outlook also of the menfolk, particularly of the intellectual and professional classes. The mass murder of the millions of young men could not but shock feminine sensitiveness. Motherhood is a doubtful glory if its function is to supply the political slaughter-house. All these social and psychological factors contributed to the decline of the birth-rate in Germany.

Nazi militarism is frantically trying to overcome the handicap by forcing the woman back into a sort of modern *zenana*, and depressing the cultural level of the entire people. It may succeed for a time; it may not do even that much. Ultimately, the policy is bound to fail. The Germans are too cultured to breed like pigs. Even the backward peasants are educated enough to realise the uncertainties of the economic situation, and consequently have the sense of responsibility for the well-being of the coming generation.

Driven out of gainful employments, young women have no choice. They must return

to the kitchen; but in the short period between the downfall of the Kaiser and the advent of Hitler, under the ill-fated Weimar Republic, the German women lived fast and learned much. The rich experience gained in those eventful years cannot be easily obliterated. They cannot be expected to return for good to the *Kueche* (Kitchen), nor transform each home into a *Kinders-Fabrik* (factory for breeding children).

Thanks to the poverty and cultural backwardness of the masses, pre-revolutionary Russia was also a prodigious mother. The fecundity of the Russian peasantry still remains unimpaired. Mass psychology cannot be changed in a generation, specially of those who are not actively involved in the revolution. But in the cities, the birth-rate declined in the post-revolutionary period thanks to the extreme intensity of the socio-political life and a rapid cultural advance. In the coming years, the birth-rate is bound to fall throughout the U. S. S. R., in an inverse ratio to the general cultural progress guaranteed by the establishment of socialist economy. But given the new social conditions there, the law of



population will be modified. Most probably, there will be an absolute fall of the birth-rate; but within the limits of that general law, the population will expand, because there will be no economic restriction. The situation, however, will be radically different from the pre-revolutionary days, when human beings bred as a matter of habit, like animals. Cultivated people are bound to exercise discretion. Even when the economic reasons therefore are absent, higher interests of life interfere with child-bearing, while freeing and enriching the emotional life based upon sex-attraction, called love. The sex-impulse in human beings differs from that in animals in that it rises above the biological function of reproduction, and expresses itself in a variety of beautiful forms of emotion.

In the prevailing cultural atmosphere of India, the question of birth-control arises only in the case of the modern educated middle-class. Therefore, the introduction of the practice will not generally touch the problem of population. Nevertheless, it will certainly enable the middle-class to overcome some of the difficulties they

experience under the given socio-political conditions of the country. Unemployment has become a veritable nightmare for the middle-class youth; none of the palliatives suggested, even if seriously applied, will relieve the distress. The hopeless position of the middle-class, in its turn, reflects the economic bankruptcy of the masses. "Prosperity" built on that precarious foundation of mass bankruptcy cannot in any way be shared by the middle-class. The solution of the problem lies in a quickening of the general economic life of the country, in rapid industrialisation on a large scale, not cramped by the limitations of the capitalist mode of production. That means not only formal national freedom, but the creation of a really democratic State.

Meanwhile, the distress of the middle-class grows, sapping the physical energy and weakening the mental vigour of the very social elements who are to play an important role in the impending political revolution which must take place as a condition for the rejuvenation of the Indian society.

Any number of young men are married while still in the school, and are fathers of

children when they find themselves unemployed, indeed, practically unemployable, on finishing their academic education. Can you expect them to be public-spirited, concerned with anything but their own affairs? Weighed down by their own burden, they have no time to think of others. Unemployment may make the educated youth discontented; some of them may be driven to desperate acts. But on the whole, it is bound to have a depressing and demoralising effect. Those engrossed with the immediate problem of earning a livelihood cannot have a broad vision. They are bound to be indifferent to general social problems, and disinclined to have a long perspective of things.

Of course, all these immediate problems will not be directly solved by the practice of birth-control. But it will be beneficial psychologically, and in consequence arrest the moral degeneration and physical deterioration of the youth. In other words, the practice of birth-control may not have any direct economic value; it will, however, touch other aspects of the social problem. It will free the youth from handicaps imposed upon them by tradition and the

established social and domestic customs. That freedom will enable them to see beyond the tip of their nose, so to say; to take a broad view of the situation; to realise that their particular problems result from a general problem. They will have a greater freedom of action, and that will mean a great impetus for the mobilisation of the forces of social renaissance.

The practice of birth-control will relieve the youth of the burden of domestic responsibilities which, incurred obligatorily, they simply cannot discharge under the given conditions of the country. The young people marry, and have children automatically. Why should they not avoid the responsibility which cannot be discharged, for no fault of theirs? Why should they, as a matter of animal habit, sanctified by patriarchal social traditions, beget children they cannot provide for, cannot equip suitably for the struggle of life, cannot even guarantee the minimum requirements for a normal physical growth? The alternative may be not to marry; and celibacy is a laudable virtue in this country. But it is not generally practised simply because it cannot be.

The institution of marriage is primarily based upon the necessity of performing a fundamental biological function, in an orderly manner, so to say. The opposite sexes naturally attract each other. Celibacy, therefore, is an outrage against nature. However, supposing there is a mass flight from marriage, what will be the result? There will be a promiscuous practice of sex intercourse, in the so-called immoral and illicit manner.

One may choose not to marry, refuse to enter into a man-made relation; but he is bound to obey the law of nature. Some of the bachelors may be celibates; the majority are not. Therefore, apart from the moral aspect, the abnormal situation will produce a new problem—illegitimate children *en masse*. That nasty problem could be obviated in one of the two possible ways: clandestine infanticide on an enormous scale, or practice of birth-control. No sensible person would dispute that the latter alternative would certainly be preferable, morally as well as humanly. Trying to find an alternative to the "immoral and unnatural" practice of birth-control, we are thus driven to that

very device as the lesser of the two evils born of a futile attempt to find an easy way out of a difficult social situation.

Then, mass flight from marriage is not a practical proposition. It is not permitted by Hindu social custom. To marry is a religious duty; so also is to beget children, in wedlock. Those who would not permit the practice of birth control on moral and religious grounds, could not, for the same reason, countenance refusal to marry, except in the cases of individuals taking the vow of celibacy, and there can only be exceptions. But in the case of women, marriage is the law. If a large number of men refuse to marry, there will be an equal number of unmarried women—a situation not permitted by our social custom and religious tradition. So, by compelling the women to marry, Hinduism deprives men also of the freedom in that respect. Polygamy no longer offers an escape out of the dilemma; on a large scale, it has become an economic impossibility. Consequently, practically all men also must marry, as a rule, if Hindu society is to stick to the prejudice that single women are misfortunes. The hypothetical remedy of mass

flight from marriage thus has to be ruled out. It is unavailable as well as ineffective for curing the evil of unwanted children.

The practice of birth-control has become an economic necessity for the distressed middle-class; therefore, it is finding favour with the more intelligent, more courageous and more responsible among the educated youth of both sexes. Realising that, under the given economic conditions of their class, they may not be able to bring up children properly, they are reluctant to incur the responsibility. Nor do they wish to prejudice their freedom of action by early, premature, parenthood. They want to grow as men and women, live a love-life free from the cares of domesticity, before becoming fathers and mothers. They feel that the duty to themselves must have priority over their other duties. There is no selfishness in this attitude. On the contrary, it betokens a sense of social responsibility.

Few normal youths would choose to be celibate bachelors or old maids hugging the dubious virtue of virginity. The control of child-birth, either in wedlock or outside, is the only way out of the dilemma. The more

courageous are advocating it; the practice is growing. The venerable custodians of India's religious traditions and the self-appointed keepers of her moral conscience are horrified and scandalised by the perversity of youth. But what alternative way do they show? Dare they enjoin that children must be bred as a religious duty, even when the parents are fully conscious of their inability to provide for the new-comers? By issuing such absurd injunction, our elders would forfeit their claim to guide the youth. There is a confusion, which is more confounded by pompous moralisings and platitudinous talks about Indian ideals. That does not help when an important social element is confronted with the question: To be or not to be—should birth-control be practised or not? There must be a clear answer. The question is too acute to be begged. None can advocate habitual breeding of unwanted children, and yet claim to have any sense of responsibility. On the other hand, prejudice precludes the courage of facing the fact. Failed by the elders, the youth must find their way out of the crisis.





It is reported that the other day Margaret Sanger interviewed Mahatma Gandhi, and had a prolonged discussion with him on the question of birth-control. Since then, the controversy has been carried on in the press. The opposing arguments are familiar enough. But the interesting point is that the Mahatma disapproves not of birth-control as such, but of the use of contraceptives for the purpose. He is of the opinion that married people should abstain from sex-intercourse, if they don't want children. He simply brushes aside the complications which will surely result from the proposed practice of married celibacy. He would not admit that this novel method of birth-control is a physical impossibility for the ordinary mortal made of flesh and blood.

Then, there arises the obvious question—Why marry at all? Why does not the Mahatma recommend mass *Brahmacharya*? Instead of making the curious proposition that each home should be transformed practically into a monastery, why not advise young men and women to become monks and nuns? The answer is not difficult to find.

For the Hindu, marriage is a religious duty. But then comes the contradiction: to breed is also a religious duty. According to Hinduism, the object of marriage is to have children. Childless marriage is regarded as a misfortune. If the wife fails to give birth to children, the husband is entitled to marry again. If we are to be guided by strict scriptural injunctions, birth-control, even as advised by Gandhi, cannot be legitimately practised. Because, that would be violating scriptural rules and social traditions. Yet, Gandhi takes his stand precisely on these grounds. Two questions are involved in the controversy. One about sex-intercourse; is it sinful, except when performed for breeding? Is it not a physical and emotional necessity, irrespective of the act of procreation? Is it harmful for spiritual (in the broad sense of mental and emotional) development? The other question is about the position of women in Hindu society.

Gandhi advises women to resist lustful husbands. It is rather flattering for the fair sex. But few will be deceived. Sex-attraction is mutual. Women are no more goddesses than men are animals. Before giving

them the advice, one should enquire if they want to resist. The fact is that they do not, and that fact alone shows that the moralist does not know what he is talking about, although he lays the claim to an intimate acquaintance with the psychology of women, —a strange claim on the part of a Saint. However, Gandhi's advice to women assumes that they are free agents. Are they? Does Hinduism permit women to resist their husbands? Moreover, Gandhi's approach to the problem of sex-intercourse has no regard for personal inclination. He looks at it from what he considers to be a religious and moral point of view, the morality being a peculiarly dogmatic brand of his own. Therefore, he advises women to do something which is totally incompatible with their place in society, allotted to them by religion and tradition.

Let alone the position of women in Hindu society; even in modern countries, where women have much more rights than in India, resistance is a legitimate ground for divorce. It is regarded as a violation of the marriage contract. Of course, one hears much about the spirituality of the Hindu

institution of marriage: it is not a mere contract, but a religious sacrament. Granted it is so, it only imposes a greater obligation on the women. It is not a contract made voluntarily by the parties concerned. It is a sacrifice of the woman; the proprietary right over her is transferred to the husband, and the transaction is sanctified by religion. The essence of the Hindu marriage ceremony is that the parents of the girl make of her a gift to the groom, who may have to be coaxed to accept the gift with additional inducements of more concrete value. Evidently not much importance is attached to the intrinsic value of the girl. However, the condition, on which the bridegroom accepts the gift, is that the girl will obediently perform all the wifely duties laid down by religious codes and social customs. To bear children is the most fundamental of those duties. So, the possibility of resistance is altogether ruled out, if wives are to be up to the ideals of Hindu womanhood. The *summum bonum* of these is complete subservience to the husband, who is to be served, pleased and worshipped as a god, even as the God. If the deified

husbands are so-perverse as to find pleasure in sex-intercourse, as they usually are, what are the wives to do? They have no choice. The freedom to love or not to love is not a part of the noble ideal of Hindu womanhood. It is a religious duty, indeed obligation, of the woman to serve and satisfy the husband in every way, whether she loves him or not; and what is still worse, whether he loves her or not.

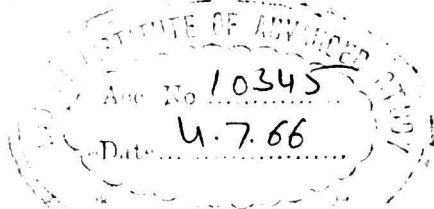
The impractical proposition for controlling sex-intercourse, and the dogmatic moral injunctions of Gandhi, provoked the following protest from the rebellious youth: "You want everyone to become moral in order to change the world. I do not exactly know what you mean by morality—whether you confine it to matters sexual, whether it covers the whole field of human conduct. I suspect the former, because I don't see you pointing out to your capitalist and landlord friends the great injustice and harm they are doing by making huge profits at the expense of labourers and peasants. While you are never tired of castigating young men and women for their moral lapse in sexual matters, and upholding before

them the virtue of celibacy, I humbly request you to be kind and compassionate to the youth and not to judge them by your puritanical standard of morality. Every act, when it is performed with mutual consent and mutual love, is moral, whether it is performed within marriage or without. I would here ask you not to forget your own youth when judging the present day youth. You were an oversexed individual, given to excessive indulgence, which seems to have created in you a sort of disgust towards sexual acts, and hence your asceticism. Compared to you, I think, many young men of to-day are better in this respect."

The above extracts from a letter were published in the "Harijan". The name of the writer was not given out, but the letter was characterised as "typical". Presumably, many such had been received. However, it is a severe criticism of Gandhi's moral doctrines. But in his answer, he avoids the concrete issues raised about his attitude on fundamental social questions, and gives a dissertation on metaphysical ethics. He writes: "Ethics and religion are convertible terms. A moral life without reference to

religion is like a house based upon sand. Morality includes truth, *ahimsa* and continence. Non-violence and continence are derivable from truth, which for me is God. Without continence, a man or woman is undone. To have no control over the senses is like sailing in a rudderless ship, bound to break to pieces on coming in contact with the very first rock. If mutual consent makes a sex-act moral, whether within or without marriage, and by parity of reason, even between members of the same sex, the whole basis of sexual morality is gone. There is hope for a decent life only so long as the sex-act is definitely related to the conception of precious life. This rules out of count perverted sexuality, and to a lesser degree, promiscuity and condonation, if not endorsement, of unnatural vice."

It is not a very original doctrine to refer morality to religion. The fallacy of this fundamental doctrine of dogmatic ethics is the assumption that man is naturally immoral. There is no difference between this moral philosophy and the Christian dogma of original sin. The assumption that man is naturally immoral or sinful contradicts the



idea of soul. Goodness or virtue has little merit if men are to be coerced to be good or virtuous. It is an insult to the intelligence of man to say that he can behave decently only under fear or compulsion. Morality is real only when it can stand by itself, when it does not require any metaphysical or religious sanction. The free self-respecting and dignified individual prefers the old Epicurean conception of morality; his or her desire to be good, virtuous and noble as a matter of free will makes him or her revolt against the tyranny of the God or scriptural injunctions.

Gandhist morality is admittedly a bunch of dogmas. In order to be moral, one must be truthful. One abstraction is referred back to another. Unless we are given a clear criterion of truth, this sort of morality remains an undefined virtue. Then, continence. If that is essential for a virtuous life, why did not God make us all aphrodites? In that case, continence would be natural to all, and the world would be populated with a tribe of virtuous and godly beings. But it seems that the Maker's aesthetic sense revolted against the idea of such a monstrosity, and he preferred to make "sinfulness" inherent in the



nature of man. Therefore, it is a bold, indeed sacrilegious, assertion that without continence a man or woman is undone.

The fallacy of Gandhi's moral doctrine is thus exposed in the light of its own standards. Empirically, it appears to be even more monstrous. Are the higher type of men and women of Europe morally and intellectually any worse than Indians? Moreover, Gandhi regrets that the Indians also do not practice continence. Well, then, you are preaching an unattainable ideal, which is a physical impossibility. It is idle to spin out volumes, and pester people with boring sermons, when there are more practical tasks to be accomplished and more reliable goals to strive for. As a matter of fact, the whole sermon is superfluous. Who preaches uncontrolled sex life? Life itself generally provides the necessary control. Only pampered parasites can dissipate, and for them, the moralist has no rebuke, as very pertinently pointed out by the correspondent quoted above.



The prophet should study the subject before laying down absolute dictums. Homo-

sexuality is rampant among Indian young men. It is an abnormality. But what is the cause? There are social as well as psychological reasons. Sex-segregation of the adolescent, and economic difficulties on the way to the satisfaction of a natural desire, in the normal and candid manner, drive young men to the homosexual habit. Remove those obstacles, and the practice would very largely disappear. No amount of moralising would have the same effect.

As regards the sexual relation between men and women, what, after all, is the basis of sex-morality, except mutual consent and love? The moralists do not realise the perversity of the role religion plays in this relation. The institution of religious marriage sanctions the commission of rape *en masse*. Neither consent nor love, on the part of the woman is a condition for the sexual satisfaction of the man, and this brutality is sanctioned not only by law, but by religion. Is that very moral? A fundamental human emotion is subjected to vulgar utilitarianism, when it is held that sex-intercourse is permissible only with the purpose of breeding children.

Scientifically, this vulgar utilitarianism ignores the fact that procreation does not necessarily require sex-intercourse. There are animals which do without it. In a certain stage of biological evolution, procreation takes place through the division of cells. Sex is a later development, as the basis of an emotion which attains a high level of nobility in the human species. Procreation is the biological by-product of that noble emotion. It may not be very long before the biological event of procreation may be altogether separated from the beautiful emotional super-structure of sex-life. Artificial creation of life is already a theoretical possibility. It will be practicable in course of time. Why should, then, women be subjected to the agony of child-bearing as a part of her religious duty or social responsibility? Until science gives her greater freedom, she should not be compelled to bear children except voluntarily.

However, even when artificial creation of life will be practicable, sex will remain. Men and women will be mutually attracted. Love will continue to enrich their life. Sex-act, committed as the expression of the emotion

called love, will be independent of "the conception of precious life". According to Gandhi, all hope for a decent life will disappear in that case. How, then, are we to avert that catastrophe? The imperious march of scientific knowledge cannot be arrested by the senseless sermon of the moralist. Are we, then, going to castrate all men and sterilise all women, to keep them from the sinful act of sex-intercourse, when the creation of life will be independent of it?

It is sheer blasphemy to condemn sex-act as an unnatural sin. Incidentally, one may ask the curious question: what are natural sins? Sex-impulse is natural. To suppress it, therefore, is unnatural, and sinful, if we talk in religious terms. For, that is violation of an order created by God. If God did not sanction the commission of sex-act, except for procreation, he could have spared human beings the infliction of the sex-impulse. He could ordain so that procreation took place by the division of cells all through the process of biological evolution. As a matter of fact, it happens that way even in the human species. So, in the strict scientific sense, the enjoyment of sex-intercourse has very little

to do with the process of procreation. The relation between the two is only accidental. It is now theoretically known that the two events can be separated. Thus, with the higher biological forms, sex-intercourse, essentially, is the expression of an emotion generated by mutual attraction of the sexes.

Gandhi's reply to the bold charge made against him personally by the correspondent is apologetic. He claims to have practised Brahmacharya since he was thirty-three. That by itself is not a very creditable record. But the hollowness of that record itself is exposed by a very significant confession he made last year. The confession was that the sex-impulse was still very strong in the old man nearing seventy, after more than thirty years of the practice of Brahmacharya. Nature takes her revenge. Even the Saint cannot cheat her. The life-stories of all the Saints of history bear testimony to defeat in the struggle against the laws of nature. The impulse is not killed, nor controlled. Gandhi's confession proves that the charge of over-sexuality is not unfounded. With a normal man, the sex-impulse generally disappears, by the time one approaches seventy. Gandhi

is sixty seven. The fact of over-sexuality is further proved by the obsession with the question of sex. These are no personal reflections. The object is to show that his own life disproves the dogma of the moralist.

Yet, defending his opposition to birth-control, Gandhi wrote in the "Harijan" that the middle-class has become impotent, owing to bad habits on the part of the youth. He deplored that young school and college girls should avidly read birth-control literature and even keep contraceptives. What a horror! But it does not occur to the righteous moralist that those habits, wherever they exist, result from the forced sex-ethics buttressed on religious sanctions and social taboos. Gandhi says that it is a sin against God to waste the vital fluid. What a tragic ignorance of biology! According to this ignorant view, the whole of nature does nothing but commit sins. How many seeds are wasted in her scheme of reproduction! Waste is the rule; fructification is only an accident.

Gandhi is, of course, concerned about "the sacred bond of marriage". In his opinion, its object is reproduction. No sacred bond

is necessary for that natural process. It takes place everywhere without any sacred bond. The "sacred bond of marriage", is slavery for women. They are treated as the means of production, privately owned by men. Gandhi says that the woman has been given the field of life by God, and it is her duty to make use of it. That is only a sickeningly sanctimonious way of saying the same thing—the woman is a child-bearing machine. However, if the field of life is a gift of God, why cannot the woman select the seed to be planted on her field, and hire the ploughman to her liking. To allow her that liberty, would be obeying the law of God. But the trouble with the religious people is that they are constantly violating the laws of their God, on his authority.



Many fables have been fabricated about the exalted position of the woman in Hindu society. There are volumes of legends about it. Even to-day, lyrics are woven around that fiction. Hinduism is said to concede perfect equality to women. They are granted the status of the goddesses,

though of the household variety. Granted that godly status, why should they hanker after worldly rights and privileges? These transitory, and, therefore negligible, things are not included in the perfect equality of women in Hindu society. Their lives are consummated in the mystic, indissoluble, union with their husbands. They are above the selfishness of the desire for any individual social or spiritual existence. Love, with them, is not lust, degraded to the level of carnal relations. It is a spiritual passion for giving, their own selves, being the best of the gifts, they lay at the feet of the beloved, who may not reciprocate the passion in a similar way. They love without wanting to be loved. They give without asking for anything in return. They find a pleasure in giving, in loving. The Hindu woman is the incarnation of selflessness. No wonder that men should appreciate her virtue and enshrine her in the temple of domesticity, where she enjoys endless privileges including the bearing of unwanted children. This fiction of a spiritual union gilds the galling chains of chattel-slavery.

All these fables, fictions and lyrics, how-



ever, cannot make the seeker after truth blind to the fact that the codes of Manu deprive women of all independence. Always, throughout her life, she must be under the protection of some male or other. Protection is an euphemistic term for subordination. As a matter of fact, Manu specifies the periods of a woman's life, in which she "belongs" respectively to the father, husband and the son; and the refrain of the famous code is that the woman can never be independent. The codes of Manu are said to be the treasure-house of the highest and noblest social ideals. The bulk of our modern women are still deluded by those spurious jewels. But there are some who are realising the reality of their position. The other day, one of them exploded the bubble of the fondly cherished delusions, and laid bare the lie about the exalted position of the woman in Hindu society.

"In India, for centuries, the woman's drama of life has been enacted on a puppet stage crowded with futile, frustrated and tragic characters, and it is a drama that appears to have evolved the highest religious sentiments. Her mute surrender to

things as they had been ordained became synonymous with the highest manifestation of feminine virtue and the glory attached to it. The more she bore injustice and wrong without murmur, the more she subjugated her personal life to the dictates of primitive proprietary tribalism, the more woman-like, the more virtuous, she became. For centuries, the woman was regarded as a living ware that should belong to some man; so she was married off at the earliest possible opportunity. Once possessed, she went through life as man's possession—never as a play-mate, not even a play-thing, but just a possession.”\*

The pious defenders of Indian traditions and the ideals of Indian culture are perturbed by the spread of Western influence among the educated women of the younger generation. They not only deplore the tendency, but publicly castigate the corrupt for deserting the noble ideals of Indian womanhood. But in doing so, they themselves expose the significance of those cherished ideals.

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\* Nilima Devi, "Hindusthan Times", February 10, 1936.

In a meeting held on March 20, 1936 under the auspices of the Delhi Women's League, such an authoritative exponent of Hindu culture as Dr. Bhagwan Das declared; "We must not talk in terms of equality between man and woman. They are both halves of humanity. We must rather talk in terms of companionship than equality." It is all very bewildering—this mystification of the simplest things. For harmonious relationship between man and woman, equality is not necessary. But these very custodians of Indian culture, as politicians, criticise the doctrine of India's partnership in the British Empire on the ground that true partnership is possible only on the basis of equality. Have they been talking nonsense all this time? Or do they talk through their pugrees or Gandhi caps, while expounding the metaphysics of the relation between man and woman? Evidently, the latter is the case; for, the position they take up as politicians is undoubtedly sound.

Halves are not equals—queer arithmetic! If halves are not equal, then, they are not halves. A non-existing relation is idealised so that the negation of equality may appear

plausible. What is the corollary to this axiom of mystic mathematics? The partnership between man and woman is not equal. We are taught that the Hindu institution of marriage binds two souls in a unified existence. If the components are not equal, clearly, one is more than the other. Which is the superior? The man, of course. Companionship is a myth. Man is the protector of the weaker vessel which he owns. That is the law of Manu.

Why deny equality? Have women no souls? Souls are supposed to be so many sparks of the Divine Light. Thus, to deny women equality with men is a blasphemy against the fundamental tenet of Hinduism. But when it comes to the vital question of proprietary right, religion can go by the board, if it happens to contradict the most precious principle of social relations. In the feudal-patriarchal society, woman is regarded and treated as a part of man's worldly possessions. Therefore, the defenders of the ideals of ancient India cannot tolerate the talk of equality between man and woman.

But despite all the panegyrics of its fictitious ideals, the feudel-patriarchal society is

an ugly ghost of the past. It lies in ruins, waiting to be cleared away. The ancient ideals have lost all force, their social foundation having been undermined by time and by the impact of modern civilization. They can be defended only with sophisticated arguments, if the defenders are reluctant to play the damaging role of rank reactionaries. The worm, however, is turning. In a rapidly growing number, young educated women are refusing to be deluded by fables, to be taken in by the sophistry of the "modern Rishis". They live under changing social conditions, and consequently cannot escape the contagion of new ideals. The crisis created by the rise of modern women, inspired by the new ideals of a real freedom and partnership on the basis of equality, has been vividly depicted by one of them already quoted above. Let me quote her once again.

"Any woman, who dares to solve her personal problems outside the rigid framework of the feudalistic system in which she is born, runs the risk of not only being regarded as a rebel, but also labelled a woman militant. Any slight ruffling of the placid surface of Indian life looks to the die-hard a portent

of storm. The defenders of a system that has relied for its maintenance on the perpetuation of injustice to a large majority of its members, would naturally take fright at the faintest rattling of their prisoners' chains. And who have been more enslaved under this system than the Indian women? Among the most vocal exponents of the women's movement are scarcely to be found the representatives of those who have suffered the worst and endured the most. Were these women to speak out, Indian society would be faced with a problem far more ominous than the alarmists could imagine."

If the legend about the exalted position of woman in Hindu society had any foundation of fact, there would be no cause for this crisis. Why should women rebel, if they had really enjoyed the respect and companionship of men? Lest the above voice of a courageous pioneer be dismissed as the ranting of a blind fanatic, I shall cite the opinion of one who cannot be accused of running down Indian culture wantonly.

In his farewell address to the students of the Andhra University, in March 1936, Sir S. Radhakrishnan pronounced the following

severe judgment. "Religious bigotry, which treats millions of our countrymen in a senseless and inhuman way, and imposes intolerable disabilities and inconveniences on the womanhood of the country, is a standing danger. It is corruption of the spirit. Those who impose such disabilities on other human beings are themselves victims of ignorance and superstition."

But what should we think when we find national leaders defending those disabilities, and denouncing whoever revolts against the inequitable system, as misguided by false ideals? Superstitious most of them are, more or less, but they cannot claim the credit of the bliss of ignorance. They know what they are talking about. Their opposition to all new ideas and movements is deliberate. They are defenders of an antiquated social order, based upon the slavery of the multitude, sanctified by religion. Ideas of equality and freedom are foreign to the "spiritualist" tradition of India. The belief in the fictitious equality of immaterial souls, together with the doctrine of spiritual liberation, dismisses social equality and worldly freedom as paltry things, not to be bothered about.

My soul is free; how can I ever be a slave? The stark reality of social slavery is obscured by the fiction of a free soul. The idea of human freedom is not compatible with the belief in a teleological order. Everything in the world is predetermined by the inscrutable Will of God. How can then a mortal be free?

The defenders of a social order based on such religious dogmas are naturally horrified when even women begin to be attracted by strange ideas imported from the accursed West. The impertinence of women demanding equality and freedom forces the protagonists of Indian culture to tell the truth about the place allotted to women by the saintly law-givers of ancient India. They have no patience for new-fangled ideas; and, when provoked, they sternly show women their place.

Deprecating the demand of modern woman, Dr. Bhagwan Das, in the speech quoted above, expounded the Hindu doctrine about marriage and family. "Marriage is not a picnic; it is discipline which people must carry out. Society would break up, if men and women forgot the sacredness of



marriage, and talked of it in loose terms. In India, family is the unit of society; in the West, the individual. Our system is undoubtedly the best. Indians don't believe in individualism. Our ideal is humanism, familyism."

There we have the naked truth, told by a "modern Rishi". The relation between man and woman is clearly defined. The Indian ideal of womanhood is depicted realistically; and it is a matter of categorical imperative. There *must* be discipline; laws laid down for the governance of a patriarchal society must be obeyed, even to-day in the midst of the twentieth century. Marriage is not a picnic, we are told. What does that mean? It means that marriage is not a companionship; that it is an indissoluble bond which deprives woman of all freedom, denies her the right to an individual existence. A wife is not a human being. For her, there are only duties to be performed, not voluntarily, but under an inflexible discipline. The doctrine of discipline, which prohibits even freedom of thought, transforms the individual into an automaton. A society, composed of robots, who do not think, but only obey, is a

prison. Laws are sovereign only when they are made by common consent. Of course, social conduct and family relations should be disciplined, but the discipline must not be imposed from above. It should be voluntary. Otherwise, it is coercion. The discipline demanded by one of our "modern Rishis" is of this kind.

There might be some excuse for this autocratic doctrine of social and family relations, if discipline was demanded from all concerned. But that is not the case. It is neither a matter of argument nor of theory. It is a matter of fact that, while with women scripturally prescribed discipline is an absolute bondage, with men, it is a matter of mere formality. Indeed, even theoretically, the burden of discipline is not equitably distributed. Man, as the father and husband, is the disciplinarian; the burden of discipline falls all on the woman. The Hindu marriage ceremony does not establish a relation of companionship. It places the woman under the protection of the man. And the social protectorate of man over woman is no more an "alliance for existence", for mutual benefit, than political protectorate of the stronger

Powers over the weak. In either case, protectorate is a camouflaged form of possession. The rituals of Hindu marriage give lie to all the lyrical legends about, and sophisticated interpretations of, the relation established thereby. The modern Rishis may torture the text to suit their purpose of defending the social subordination of woman; but the texts themselves are there to tell the truth; and if women are to live up to the traditionally fixed ideals, and observe the prescribed discipline, they must act textually according to the rituals. They must live a life of sacrifice, devotion and duty. These ideals, with all the sentimental glamour, cannot delude any self-respecting woman.

For women, Hindu marriage is certainly not a picnic. There is no question of love, except as a *post factum* make-believe. Marriage is not a voluntary contract to be carried out by both the parties under prescribed laws. Women are simply handed over to new masters, to whom they are to be bound forever. When responsibility is not voluntarily incurred, discipline cannot be morally demanded. Let women choose; let marriage be conditional on an intelligent consent on

their part; then talk of discipline. To demand discipline under an involuntary relation, a relation established by a transfer of proprietorship, is coercion, pure and simple. The Hindu marriage grants women no rights whatsoever; it imposes only obligations. Discipline under such circumstances is compulsion to discharge responsibilities not voluntarily contracted. And a responsibility has no moral force unless it is voluntarily assumed. One cannot be held responsible for some act he has not committed. It is not my duty to perform acts that I have never undertaken to do. The concepts of duty and responsibility presuppose agreement. In the absence of previous agreement, there is neither duty nor responsibility. So, the question of discipline under the relation established by Hindu marriage does not arise.

We are told pontifically that society would break up if men and women forgot the sacredness of marriage and talked of it in loose terms. Well, it is a well known fact that men generally seldom abide by the sacred vow; yet, society has not fallen to pieces. But the foundation of society would be shaken, if women expressed dissatisfac-

tion at the treatment accorded to them. So, the bond of sacredness is only for them; and it is not very sacred, though it is certainly a bond. The taboo on "talk in loose terms" means prohibition of the criticism of an established relation which has become galling—utterly incompatible with changed social relations, and intolerable for women growing up under these conditions. Women should not even complain. For them, it is indecent to have any grievance. They must remain fascinated by the fictitious ideals placed before them. The laws laid down by Manu ages ago are still immutable.

But what about men? Why is discipline not nearly so rigorous in their case? Why are they not held to the sacred vow of marriage? Simply, because the scriptures do not demand of them the same discipline as in the case of women; because their vow, formally as sacred as in the case of women, is nevertheless very elastic. The indissolubility of the marriage bond does not place them under any disadvantage. The bond is really indissoluble only when it precludes another marriage. It was so under mediæval Christianity. Neither the man nor

the woman could contract a second marriage; and, divorce being disallowed, the bond was equally binding for both the parties. That practice should logically follow from the doctrine that marriage is a sacred tie. The Hindu practice is not only illogical; it is positively immoral.

Polygamy mocks at the supposed sacredness of marriage. Those who take the doctrine of sacredness seriously must condemn polygamy as no less criminal than adultery. But, instead of doing what is demanded by an elementary sense of morality, Hinduism sanctions polygamy. The immoral practice of adultery is religiously sanctioned. That is one of the achievements of the spiritualist culture of India. What should we think of religious social codes which sanction an obviously immoral practice? Intelligent and free-thinking people cannot but condemn them in the severest possible terms.

Drawing the logical conclusion from the doctrine that marriage is a sacred bond, Catholicism prohibits its dissolution. Hindus are also vociferous in their condemnation of divorce which is regarded as a Western perversity. As reply to the European criti-

cism of undeniably shameful social practices still prevalent in this country, Indian apologists of those practices point an accusing finger at the frequency of divorce in some of the Western countries. It does not occur to them that forced sex-relation is no better than rape. To prohibit divorce is to sanction rape committed *en masse* with religious sanction. In his latest work, a renowned authority on the subject writes that the frequency of divorce is a sign of the strength of marriage. With a carefully collected and critically sifted mass of statistical data, he shows that divorce is not so frequent as the alarmists picture it to be. In the United States, for example, there is only one divorce to every six marriages. The ratio is not higher in the U. S. S. R. where marriage and family are generally believed to have disappeared.\*

The Hindu prohibition of divorce is all the more immoral because it is one-sided. Since a man can take as he wishes, for him, the prohibition is entirely formal and ineffective. A freedom given to man is denied

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\* E. Westermarck, "The Future of Marriage in Western Civilization"

to the woman. The discipline also is obviously one-sided. For women only, marriage is a religious sacrament-an indissoluble bond. In the case of men, it is a picnic, a business proposition which in a feudal-patriarchal society, is very profitable. Where were our Spartan disciplinarians when Brahmans of blue blood took wives by dozen, but left them with their parents to be visited periodically on the payment of an honorarium, preference being given to those who paid more for a night with the perambulating male prostitute? Discipline or the sacredness of the marriage vow does not prohibit a man to have several wives, on a variety of pretexts, some of which are positively immoral, even inhuman. If a woman fails to perform the duty of bearing children, the man may take a new wife. The unfortunate woman is degraded to the humiliating position of a household servant for no fault of hers. She cannot possibly help her barrenness. Often, this is caused by disease or physical maladjustments which can be cured by proper medical treatment. To have her so treated is obviously the responsibility of the husband. Hinduism places not even such an elemen-



tary responsibility on him. He is allowed to acquire a fertile field, while retaining the possession of the barren one. He is still entitled to use her sexually, for a change or as occasional pastime. That habit amounts to the practice of concubinage under the sacred institution of Hindu marriage. Yet, any criticism of this immoral institution is denounced as "loose talk", even in these enlightened days, when educated people should be guided rather by reason than by authority.

It is not only immoral, but cruel, inhuman form of oppression—veritable slavery. If the husband is impotent, the wife has no way out. In consequence of that misfortune, she is bound to have psychological complications. She is in the danger of those complications developing into the pathological state of hysteria. Religious prejudice may taboo sex; but the laws of nature are more powerful than the man-made laws of religion. A natural impulse cannot be killed by a *fiat*. Frustrated in the satisfaction of sex-impulse, normal human beings are bound to be ruined psychically, if not always physically. But let alone these considerations, which lead to the controversy over the ques-

tion of sex-satisfaction. There is another consideration, having a direct bearing on the subject under discussion.

None would dispute the legitimacy and naturalness of the woman's desire for motherhood. To deny her the right of release from an impotent husband is to condemn her to a life of frustration in every respect. Motherhood is said to be the crowning glory of woman. The Hindu institution of marriage deprives her even of the freedom to attain that glory, which is admittedly her share. It is the duty of woman to bear her husband children. If she fails, due to causes beyond her control, man has the freedom of action. But similar failure on the part of the husband does not absolve the woman from the sacred vow of marriage!

Fidelity is generally considered to be the essence of marital relation. Hinduism does not demand that of men. As far as they are concerned, marriage is legalised adultery. Polygamy is legalised adultery which is practised on all sorts of pretexts, often most frivolous. A protracted illness on the part of the wife absolves the husband from the vow of fidelity. In that case, he is morally

and scripturally entitled to take another wife for the sake of keeping up the family. And it is a part of the ideal of Indian womanhood not only to acquiesce in that heartless act of desertion, but to welcome the co-wife cheerfully and love her as a sister. It may be a noble ideal. That is a matter of taste and ethical sensibility. The prescribed conduct, however, is an emotional impossibility. Helpless women conform formally; but the sense of morality and justice, when not dulled by the blind respect for tradition, naturally revolts against the practice, and must condemn it as a callous method of degrading women to the position of chattel—machines acquired by men for manufacturing children.

Adultery is condemned as a moral offence. What is adultery? It is to practice co-habitation disregarding the pledge of fidelity to the married mate. If the moral condemnation of adultery has any sense, it must logically imply that one cannot be married to more than one person at the same time. The moral sanction for the condemnation of adultery is derived from the notion that the pledge of fidelity is sacred. The moral con-

demnation of adultery logically provides the justification for divorce, which nevertheless is such a pet abomination of the Indian moralists.

When a man, for some reason or other, wishes to have a second wife, the obviously ethical thing for him to do is to absolve the first wife of the pledge of fidelity which he himself proposes to withdraw from his side. The prohibition of divorce is disregard for this very elementary sense of morality and justice. Why should the woman remain bound to the man, when he is no longer faithful to her even formally? When the pledge of fidelity is not equally binding for both the parties concerned, marriage evidently is not a companionship, but subordination of the woman to the man. In Hindu marriage, the pledge is admittedly not mutually binding. The man is entitled to commit adultery. But a sin is a sin, even when it is committed with religious sanction. In that case it is religion which is exposed as an immoral system. Hinduism condemns adultery as a moral offence, but permits it when committed according to religious laws! A man can break his pledge of fidelity to the

married mate with the sanction of religion. If he wishes to commit adultery, he has simply to marry the object of his lust; and he is entirely free to do so. Is not the pledge of fidelity a mockery? What is the sense of giving a pledge which does not bind?

For all practical purposes, Hinduism prohibits divorce only in the case of women; it grants men all its benefits. When the marriage bond does not bind him to anything, man does not require the right of divorce. The Hindu horror for divorce is based on the principle that women naturally are not entitled to the freedom of sex-relation enjoyed by men to the extent of downright licentiousness, with the sanction of religion. That is not a very moral principle. In fact, there is no morality in it at all. The underlying idea is of proprietorship. The woman is a part of man's worldly possessions. She is a field for him to cultivate. She is naturally destined to bear him children, just as his land bears him fruit. A man is entitled to own as many plots of land as he can afford to. Similarly, he can possess more than one wife. But it is unnatural for his wife to dispute his right of proprietorship,

even to pass on to the possession of another man. Whoever has ever heard of a plot of land or any other piece of property claim the right of choosing its owner? It is natural for a piece of property to be owned, and for the owner to add to his possession. Therefore, it is also "natural" for women to live in indissoluble wedlock, while the lord and master is free to add to his possession.

But the freedom of sex-relation on the part of women is no more unnatural than are the forms of society not based on private property. The sex-impulse is the only natural thing in this relation. The condition, under which that impulse is satisfied is a matter of social convention, and as such must change from time to time in course of social progress. No one form of sex-relation is more or less natural than another; and none is unnatural, because always it is the fulfilment of a natural urge. The freer the relation, the fuller the life, and therefore the more natural it is.

Divorce is condemned on the ground that it is not compatible with the ideal of Indian womanhood. It was on this ground that Dr. Bhagwan Das denounced the Western

practice of divorce. The ideal thus is subordination of women to men,—an absence, in the case of the former, of the freedom of sex-relation which is accorded to the latter. That certainly is not a very noble ideal. Enlightened women, at any rate, can no longer be deluded by it; nor can it be justified, much less glorified, by free-thinking men with a sense of justice and morality.



While our nationalist leaders wax eloquent about traditional ideals, the reactionary nature of which is palpable to anyone able to distinguish facts from fiction, there are others who have the courage and progressive spirit to take a realistic view of the position of women in Hindu society, and plead for the much needed improvement. The following, for example, is quoted from a speech by the Maharani of Baroda, who certainly cannot be accused of any feminist extravagance, nor suspected of the insidious spirit of revolt against the Hindu culture.

“Far from allowing her that equality with man, which in modern society is her natural and inalienable right, the law as it stands in

by far the greater part of the country places her at a most unfair disadvantage. According to the Hindu Law, the joint family comprises only the male members; a woman is not a co-partner, but a mere dependent, with no right of ownership in the joint property. Why do you allow yourselves to be menaced and led captive, as it were, by laws which were made for a society which differed from our own as much as chalk differs from cheese? Manu and the rest of them made excellent laws for their own time, perhaps. But why should you take them as final pronouncements? Are they the Will of God? Certainly not. They are statements of men's thought or their prejudice. Indeed, when I think of the laws they made against women, they seem to write like men who have been bitten by some serpent, so poisonous is their attitude. Their laws seem almost to breathe hatred for us. How can I help thinking so, when the law, from birth to death, makes a woman a subordinate, stifles her, so to say, in the cradle; and then says: thus and thus shalt thou live? Live? The word in their mouths mocks us! For, how can a woman live, when she is deprived



of any vestige of freedom from the beginning? First, we must bow before our fathers, then, our husbands, then husbands' relatives. Does it strike you as a just state of affairs? Would you tamely sit down under a system of law that does not allow even to call your souls your own? Is that true law or true religion? I do not blame Manu, for, after all, it may be that he honestly did his best according to his lights. But those lights burn dim in the twentieth century India."\*

Those are passionate pronouncements; but they cannot be deprecated and dismissed as the ranting of wayward youth, corrupted by Western influence. There wē have indisputable facts as against the fiction about the exalted position of women in Hindu Society. It goes without saying that the speaker is not a revolutionary. She would not advocate complete subversion of the feudal-patriarchal relationship which places upon women the disabilities so very scathingly condemned by herself. Nevertheless, she is far more progressive than most of our nationalist leaders who hold that the last word of human wis-

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\*Address to the students of the Poona Law College, April 5, 1936.

dom was pronounced by the legendary lawgivers of ancient India. She also is an admirer of Hindu culture; but her admiration is not blind. She can see things in their historical perspective; and that is the sensible manner of appreciating the positive values of past cultures.

Laws governing the relation between man and woman under the conditions of society thousand years ago, are not suitable to the circumstances of our time. To dispute this view is to deny history. Those laws might have been good in their time; they were certainly useful for the circumstance of the social system of the epoch. But from that, it does not follow that they are good or even useful for ever. When social institutions become obsolete, they must be discarded. Those suffering from their continued existence, are bound to revolt. The advocates of progress must foment that historically necessary revolt. The Hindu system of marriage is an antiquated institution. Its usefulness has disappeared with the disruption of the patriarchal family. Whether in the past it was good or bad, is a question of social research. The question is of great

importance for a critical appreciation of the ancient Indian culture; but it is irrelevant for the purpose of solving the problem which faces us to-day. The question of to-day is what position women should occupy in a modern society. We are not living in the age of Manu. Modernisation of Indian society is a historical necessity. Consistent with this necessity, can it hold on to traditional ideas and maintain old institutions which deprive women of elementary human rights? In order to answer the question correctly, facts must be faced. The situation must be regarded realistically. Instead of doing that, they talk of mystic ideals of Indian womanhood. Since the position of women in Hindu Society cannot be justified in the face of indisputable facts, fictions are fabricated. But facts are the decisive factor. They shall carry conviction.

In the above quotation, we have a realistic picture of the social status of Hindu women. The facts cannot be denied. How do the admirers of the ideal of Indian womanhood answer the challenge which is all the more formidable because it comes from a conservative quarter? In the face of

these stark realities about the position of women in patriarchal families, they glorify this antiquated social institution.



In his speech quoted above, Dr. Bhagwan Das, for example, defends the "Indian ideal of familyism" as against the individualism of the West; and he dogmatically asserts that "our ideal is the best". It is surprising that the Indian critics of Western ideas, ideals and institutions should not care to learn something about their pet abomination. The family is the unit of society also in the West. The Western society is not composed of a multitude of individuals cutting each other's throat. Individualism has not disrupted family as such. Some freedom for women, their partial liberation from the overlordship of men, repudiation of the dogma about the indissolubility of marriage, practice of divorce—all these shocking innovations have neither disrupted society, nor broken up family.

Family is not the instrument for the realisation of any mystic or metaphysical ideal. It is an institution which rises with

the creation of private property, and therefore remains the unit of society as long as society continues to be based upon private ownership. Only, its structure changes in course of the evolution of private property. Each form of private ownership is associated with a specific type of family. The Indian ideal of polygamous joint family is based upon the patriarchal property relations. If the practice of polygamy is declining, that is because of economic reasons which, in their turn, grow out of the decomposition of the patriarchal property relations constituting the foundation of joint family.

Western capitalist society is reared upon the foundation of monogamous family. So, the opposing ideals are not familyism and individualism. It is a matter of choice between two forms of family. The more backward type is proclaimed to be the Indian ideal. As the antithesis of individualism, familyism is a new name for the hoary institution of patriarchalism. The preference of this ideal means endorsement of the subordination of woman to man. For, in a patriarchal joint family, as the Maharani of Baroda aptly puts it, women are not co-partners, but mere

dependents. No amount of lyrical legends and mystic doctrines about the fictitious ideal of spiritual partnership can hide the fact of actual subordination which, except in rare cases, amounts to veritable slavery. The ideal of Indian womanhood, then, is self-abnegation for the preservation of the patriarchal family which tolerates no individual right, nor freedom, even in the case of man.

The animus against individualism shows that the glorification of the ideal of Indian womanhood is dictated by a reactionary social philosophy. How can the aspirations of the modern woman be countenanced by those whose sentiments were expressed by Dr. Bhagwan Das, when he declared, "as an Indian I do not believe in individualism"? With all its apparent boldness, it is rather a damaging declaration to come from people who pretend to be fighting for the political liberation of India. It reveals the nature of their ideal of political freedom. Individualism is the philosophical foundation of political democracy. Representative Government, government responsible to the people—popular sovereignty—all these forms of politi-

cal freedom derive their legal and moral sanction from the doctrine that the function of the State is to protect the rights and liberties of the individual, that society is an aggregate of individuals, and should be so organised and administered as to provide each of its members the greatest possible freedom and opportunity for self-development. The rejection of individualism, therefore, implies opposition to political democracy. Those who philosophically and socially reject individualism cannot be honest advocates of democratic freedom. The defence of the ideal of Indian womanhood thus logically leads to a very compromising political position. Our striving for political freedom is not consistent with the apology for this fictitious ideal of Indian womanhood.

It is maintained by its protagonists that the mystic ideal of Indian womanhood can be realised only in the iron-frame of patriarchal family. The political administration of a society based upon patriarchal family cannot be democratic. It is not possible to remain faithful to any one particular ideal of old tradition. Each form of culture has a whole complex of ideals. Having a common

economic background,—a specific form of property—they are interwoven ideologically. They must stand or fall together. Loyalty to the traditional social ideal would commit us to paternalism in politics. That is manifestly a reactionary ideal.

The economic problems of India—progressive pauperisation of the multitude and mass unemployment—could not be solved under a paternalistic State, even if that was national. Each type of political State is based upon a particular form of property, and the possibilities of the economic development are limited by the established relationship of property. A paternalistic State is the bulwark of pre-capitalist property relation which sets a narrow limit to social productivity; the masses are necessarily kept on a low level of living. The doctrines of simple living, virtuousness of poverty, sacrifice, self-control, so on and so forth, are the ideological super-structure of the pre-capitalist economy of scarcity. It is easy to see that the realisation of the reactionary ideal of a paternalistic State (Ramraj) would aggravate our economic problems, instead of solving them. As a matter of fact, these



problems have resulted largely from the maintenance of the antiquated relations of property in the basic means of production (land). The present economic ruin of the country has been brought about by the fact that the British Raj is also a paternalistic State. If paternalism is detrimental to progress, it is much more so when exercised by a foster-father, who assumes the trust tempted by the wealth of the helpless ward.

However, the point is that paternalism cannot be the political ideal of the Indian masses, who must have democratic freedom as the essential condition for the introduction of measures which will open before them the road to progress and prosperity. The cultural and social ideals—of womanhood, familyism, humanism—not consistent with this political ideal, must be discarded as reactionary. That is not a matter of opinion or a question of choice; it is a historical necessity. If the people of India are to work out their destiny, the bonds of traditional ideas and ideals must be broken. A people cannot be free, while denying liberty and equality, indeed, the barest of justice, to the women. The glorification of the ideal of

Indian womanhood clearly represents such a denial.



Yet, the deplorable fact is that a great many of our political leaders have no patience for the modern woman who demands economic rights, social emancipation and a single standard of sex-relation. While some combat these new-fangled Western ideas by holding high before the misguided the mystic ideal of Indian womanhood, there are others who do not make any bones about the true nature of that ideal, and presume to show the woman her place. Of course, they also rely on the authority of the wise men of the past, and hold up the light of ancient wisdom as the infallible guide for those who wish to avoid the pitfalls of the temptations of modern life. Only, in doing so, they burst the bubble of the ideal of Indian womanhood, because they tell frankly what according to venerable traditions, really is the place of woman in Hindu society.

Having been sermonised by a modern Rishi, the meeting of the Delhi Women's League had the privilege of being lectured

also by a modern politician. It was Bhulabhai Desai who is known to be cynical about equality in any walk of life. An eulogising nationalist newspaper reported him to have administered "some bitter pills" to the naughty women who allow themselves to be influenced by modern ideas imported from the benighted West, and consequently turn away from the ideals set before them by the wise men of the past, particularly the immortal and infallible Manu.

Mr. Desai deprecated the "false issue of antagonism between men and women"; then he asserted that this "false issue" has been falsely borrowed by India from foreign quarters. Presumably, the assertion is that Indian social conditions do not provide any reason for the issue to rise. Such an assertion implies that in Indian society women are in no way subordinated to men, that the relation is so equitable and harmonious as to obviate the possibility of any antagonism. Disregarding all the facts about the realities of women's life, in the present as well as in the past, the speaker declared that "man has always placed woman on a higher and better status." Now, that is a legend pure

and simple. Mr. Desai himself admitted that. He directly went on to describe the "higher and better status" which is supposed to be graciously granted to women by men, and with which the former should remain content. He exclaimed: "Don't fight a war of revenge; don't say 'I am a toy, a breeding machine'; don't try to send men to the kitchen. Yours is the greatest profession in the world, in which nobody can compete with you. It is no use trying to play a thing you are not. Don't enter the arena of the struggle for existence which belongs to man."

This paternalism means denial of economic freedom to women. You cook for me, bear children to inherit my property, and I shall protect you. Of course, who does not take care of the means of production? As regards the struggle for existence, no amount of benevolent, though interested, paternalism, can keep women out of the fray. Only the fortunate few can keep their women in idleness. The great majority are caught in the vortex. They are not pet idols, but chattels. Desai tried to rationalise his doctrine of patriarchal servitude with the following

argument: "They are different by nature. You cannot alter the creation of nature. A man will remain a man; and so is the case of women." If there is any woman who wanted to have a physical transformation, that is a matter of Desai's personal knowledge. The question of sex equality does not involve such obvious absurdities. But it is a different proposition to sanction social inequality on the pretext of a difference of physical structure. Women want equality as human beings. We are told *ad nauseum* that Hindu culture is based on the doctrine of equality of everything before God. Don't the women have souls? Besides, the appeal to natural distinction is a double-edged sword. It would be equally reasonable to defend the doctrine of "White Man's Burden" with this appeal. If the male is entitled to protect the female thanks to the biological distinction, is it not equally reasonable for the white race to have a similar claim on the strength of the colour of their skin?

But there seem to be women in India, (marring her holiness with their Western perversity) who are not to be fooled by patriarchal protection or romantic deception.

The President of the meeting, presumably to the horror of the distinguished preachers of the Indo-German ideals of womanhood, insisted that "it cannot be denied that women are kept in all sorts of bondage." With a subtle irony, which must have sounded as pleasing flattery to the egoistic evangelists, she said: "If all men were modern Rishis, there would be no women's movement."

We no longer need dig into the neglected store of ancient wisdom to find the Indian ideal of womanhood. We can find it in the accursed West itself, as represented, for example, by the Germany of the Kaiser or of Hitler. The imperial lord of the Germans placed before women the ideals of the *Kirche*, *Kueche*, *Kinder*—respectively meaning, Church (religion), housekeeping and children. Under the ill-fated Republic, the German women turned their back on these traditional "Aryan" ideals. The lamentable forces of degeneration have been arrested by the Nazis, who have resurrected the Indo-German ideal of womanhood by their characteristic methods. Women have been sent back to the kitchen by the ordinance of the

authoritarian State which recognises no individual right. That is also a striking example of Indian social philosophy, practised by the avowed enemies of democratic freedom. "Marry and multiply"—that is the order for women, not only in Hitler's Germany, but also in Mussolini's Italy. And those are the countries, in which the vulgar materialistic features of modern Western civilisation have entirely eclipsed its human values. The war lords require a plentiful supply of cannon-fodder. For that purpose, women have been driven out of all other occupations. They must stay at home and breed children.

The ideal of Indian womanhood, instead of being spiritually inspired, is of such a materialistic nature that it can fit into the scheme of a social philosophy which incorporates the worst features of Western culture.



To do justice to women, it should be noted with the strongest emphasis that the ideal was not conceived by themselves; it was set before them by men—by those "wise men of

ancient life"—moved by the vulgar materialistic considerations of their age. The conditions of the time compelled women to accept the position assigned to them. They had no alternative. In a society based upon patriarchal family, man is the lord and master. Deprived of all economic rights, the woman has to submit. Then, there was propaganda, in the form of religion, mythology and romantic literature, for justifying the economic subjugation of women, and glorifying their status of domestic chattel and breeding machines. Under those circumstances, women could be easily persuaded to believe in the ideals set before them. In course of time, their subordination to man, their expropriation, their social disfranchisement, their domestic slavery, their concubinage, assumed the appearance of voluntary self-abnegation, inspired by some mystic ideal of womanhood. The glittering gilt of their chain made the slaves happy in their servitude.

That was the Golden Age—of domestic harmony and social concord when there were no perverse women to demand economic freedom, to complain of being a toy, a breeding machine. Deluded by the legends of



Sitas and Savitris, they all faithfully and efficiently performed their "natural" profession—to be religious (according to the dogmas of orthodoxy), to keep house and to procreate at the pleasure of man.

But that Golden Age is a thing of the past. Its foundation—patriarchal family—lays in ruins, to be cleared away so that a new social structure can be raised in its place. The great bulk of women still remain in the bliss of ignorance, entrenched in superstitions—that specific heritage of our "spiritual culture". There are those who, though not favoured fully with the bliss, still continue with the time-honoured illusions as a matter of habit. But some have become conscious of the realities of their position at home as well as in society; who have realised the fraudulent nature of the ideal haloed by tradition, glorified in romantic legends and sung in mystic lyrics. They are growing in number. The spread of modern education is not the only cause of the awakening. It is primarily due to the slow, but sure, decomposition of an antiquated social order, the scheme of the cultural superstructure of which necessarily included mystic ideals veil-

ing the subordination of woman to the status of chattels.

Now that a growing number of women can no longer be deluded by mystic ideals, and demand to be treated as individuals capable of doing the thinking for themselves, the traditional overlordship is defended in a plain language, such as the "bitter pills" administered by Desai. If it is true that "man has always placed woman on a higher and better status", how is the "hostility between them" to be explained? The only plausible explanation will be want of appreciation and gratitude on the part of the woman. Even the stoutest opponent of the demands and aspirations of the modern woman would find it difficult to bring that manifestly false charge against Indian womanhood. Besides, "hostility between sexes" is a scare-crow. If there is any hostility, it is on the part of those very men who complain of the spirit. Being out of sympathy with the ideas and ideals of the modern woman, those old-fashioned males are naturally hostile to them. The fear of hostility on the part of women, of a revolt of the angels, of a "war of revenge", reveals a bad conscience on the

part of men. Consciousness of the fact that women have been wronged for ages, makes them apprehensive of the possible growth of a spirit of vengeance on the part of the former.

Modern women, however, are rebelling not against men, but against certain social codes and economic disabilities which place them under the domination of the male. There is no sex-war. That is an absurd idea. There cannot be any antagonism between the sexes. Sex-impulse is a force that attracts. In sex-relation itself, there can never be any inequality, either party being equally indispensable. As a rule, women cannot do without men any more than the male can dispense with the female. Inequality is in the relation between man and woman, as social units. The revolt of the modern woman is not a revolt of the female against the male; it is a revolt of one category of social units against another; of a group of the suppressed against the suppressor, rather against the conditions of their suppression,—those social and domestic conditions which do not correspond with the relation of natural equality of the sexes.

So, it was quite irrelevant to exclaim at a modern women's gathering, "Don't wage a war of revenge!". But the speaker had a guilty conscience, which was evidenced by the following exhortation—"Don't say, I am a toy, a breeding machine". He did not deny the fact that his social philosophy reduced women to toys and breeding machines. On the contrary, he told his audience to be satisfied with the "higher and better status" which man had granted to women, to carry on "the greatest profession", in which no man could compete. What is that profession? To bear children—to be breeding machines! That, then, is the "higher and better status"—the real content of the mystic ideal of Indian womanhood. Because, in the opinion of the protagonist of that reactionary ideal, those Indian women, who would not be satisfied with the "greatest profession", were allured by "false ideals borrowed from the West". But the profession is not a grant of men; nor have any normal women the least desire to abstain from it. In the frame-work of the patriarchal family—the type of family idealised by the Indian opponents of social progress—

women perform their natural profession not as free agents, but under conditions laid down for the convenience of men. Modern women revolt against those conditions, which deprive them of a freedom, theirs by birth-right.

There is no sex-war. The demand is for equality in sex-relation in society. When this natural right is denied, on the absurd plea that women did not miss it in the past, there is bound to be some bitterness. But the responsibility of that undesirable atmosphere belongs to the reactionary male, who cannot see, or will not see, that the demand grows, out of a radical change in the economic position of women. The change is brought about by the inevitable breakdown of an antiquated system of social relations which unfortunately persisted in India much longer than in the more advanced countries.



According to Indian tradition, the ideal of womanhood is to be realised in marriage, in the performance of the wifely duties, and in motherhood. But that only road to the

realisation of their "legitimate" ideal is being closed to a growing number of women. Economic conditions are quickening the sense of justice and morality which revolts against the religiously sanctioned system of polygamy. To-day, few can afford to keep more than one wife. The lapse of the practice of polygamy is bound to create the problem of a surplus of marriageable mates. The problem may not as yet be an actuality; but it is there in embryo, and is casting its shadow in advance. The desire of modern women to be something more than wives and mothers grows out of that back-ground of the dissolution of a decayed social order. With not a few of them, the problem is actual. Simultaneously with the lapse of the practice of polygamy, marriage itself is becoming a difficult undertaking, a risky venture, for a large number of young men, particularly of the educated middle-class. Unemployment and the general economic bankruptcy naturally discourage the more prudent to assume the responsibility of maintaining a wife and raising a family. The joint family offers no protection to these social derelicts. For

the expropriated and proletarianised lower middle-class, joint family exists only in form : it has lost all social significance.

- With the disappearance of the common patrimony, joint family automatically dissolves itself. The effort to maintain it, when there is nothing to be owned jointly—that is to say, after its economic foundation has been blown up—places an extra burden on this or that individual, who bears it, not voluntarily, but as a habit of conforming with tradition. This makeshift is a shadow of the real thing. In the great majority of cases, the earning capacity of individuals being limited, the burden soon becomes simply unbearable. There is nothing more to be done than to break up the skeleton of a dead system which can be yet for a time kept formally intact only by depressing the standard of living of an entire class of society. This inevitably happens when tradition compels one or two people to provide a subsistence for more than can be provided for with their individual earnings. The habit of adhering to the custom of a disrupted form of family has cost the middle-class very dear. It has contributed to the physical deteriora-

tion of the entire class. That is a tragedy—for the entire nation.

However, even with the greatest of goodwill, none can go very far with an unbearable burden. An elder brother may somehow manage to support and educate one or more younger brothers. But in most cases, it is simply beyond his capacity to maintain them with wives and children. The younger brothers are expected to contribute to the family exchequer by their earning. They cannot be dependent on the elder brother indefinitely. For themselves, that is a matter of shame; for the latter an unbearable burden, carried too far. So, mass unemployment of the educated middle-class youths is bound to break up even the skeleton of joint family in that stratum of society. Generally, elder brothers undertake the responsibility of educating younger brothers, often prejudicing the future of their own children, as an investment. That is natural. Now that education does not guarantee employment, they will naturally hesitate to invest their hard-earned money in an enterprise of such doubtful earning capacity. The marriage of young men on the expectation of their being



able to earn before long will decrease. In a progressively increasing number, young men will find themselves in a position of indigent individuals outside the pale of joint family; for them marriage will become out of question. Already, there are thousands in this precarious position. No unemployed young man of education, and with the sense of responsibility, would think of marrying and raising a family..

What is the other side of this picture? A large number of young men, unable to marry, means an equally large number of women deprived of the possibility of becoming wives and mothers. What are they going to do? There is no place for them in the traditional scheme of Hindu society. Polygamy cannot absorb them any longer. Very few people of their class can afford more than one wife today. Besides, this novel kind of outcastes belongs to the educated middle-class, themselves more or less educated. They would not be disposed of by some arbitrary arrangement sanctioned by religion and tradition; for example, to become *Devadasis* in temples or be formally married by dozens to some worthy man in death-

bed. And even then, in the latter case, the glory of widowed wife-hood would not make up for the fact of their being robbed of the greater glory of motherhood. However, the fact happily is that they would not submit to any such inhuman and immoral treatment. They are rebels, potentially, if not actually. There are many among them who have become conscious of the fact that the new conditions of life are totally incompatible with the traditional social and domestic ideals. They are the furies of the women's movement, who are admonished for their new-fangled ideas imported from the West. But they are asking a question which arises from the facts of life they are bound to live. They want to be wives; they want to be mothers. But they find their way to the fulfilment of those natural desires beset with difficulties which grow more numerous every day. A great many of the kind of men they would like to have for husbands are debarred from the venture of matrimony by economic disability. Prospective husbands, who would make excellent companions and desirable mates, may not be promising providers of material necessities. Therefore, under the

given conditions of life, in order to be wives and mothers, women are compelled to be something more; they must be fully enfranchised members of society, possessed of all the rights and responsibilities associated with that status. Otherwise, they cannot realise the natural ideals of womanhood.

In the absence of economic independence, supremacy in domestic affairs is a myth. Only as fully enfranchised citizens can women really be the queens of home. The natural ideals of womanhood are not incompatible with the greater ideals of the modern woman. It is idle to idealise home when to have a home is becoming a problem for a growing number of women. An ideal home can no longer be created by man alone. The privilege is reserved for the fortunate few who live on unearned income. But the great majority, particularly of the middle-class, are dependent on individual earning capacity which, in most cases, is quite insufficient for keeping even a small family on a tolerable standard of living. The way out of this difficulty is to broaden the basis of the co-operation between man and woman. If young people are to create pleasant homes

and raise healthy families, women must share the economic responsibility. What are they to cook, when the larder is empty? What is the joy of motherhood, if their lives are to be tormented and embittered by the *caré* of ill-fed children? If women are to share the responsibility, which hitherto has been man's, they cannot be denied the rights traditionally reserved for man. They are entitled, morally as well as legitimately, to economic independence. That means not only right of inheritance, which will be a mere legal formality in the case of the great majority. It means appearance of women in the departments of life hitherto closed for them. Their activities can no longer be confined to home. For the sake of making a home, worth the name at all, they must transcend the limits of domesticity. To-day, social equality of the sexes is necessary for the performance of their respective functions, which in the past could be done under a different relation. The recognition of woman as an individual member of society is necessary for the preservation of family,—of course, in a different form. The new type of family, which is bound to replace the disrupted joint

family, shall have to be a voluntary association of individuals, both the sexes having the same status as individual members of society.

Society originated as a voluntary association of individuals. But the old patriarchal family eclipsed the individual. A society which suppresses the individual runs contrary to its own historical purpose. The individual—man as well as woman—is prior, not only to family, but society itself, the latter being a creation and an association of individuals. Therefore, the assertion of the individual as the component of family is historically necessary; it is a progressive step which has to be taken under the pressure of the changed social conditions.

Independent economic activities on the part of women will necessarily mean some competition with men. But there will be no antagonism. For, generally, they will represent co-operation between the sexes on a larger sphere. As independently functioning members of society, women will become full partners of men. There will be real companionship. Placed on a more secure economic foundation, the family will be an

institution, happier and healthier than ever.



The Indian critics of the Western women are ignorant of the fact that it is thanks to the extension of her activities outside the traditional sphere of the home, that the institution of family, undermined by capitalism, has been kept intact. The ignorant critics denounce divorce, but know nothing about the co-operation between man and woman in the modern countries of the west. The prevailing mass unemployment would have destroyed by starvation thousands and thousands of families but for the women's activity outside home. Masses of women act as bread-winner, when men are forced to remain idle. That kind of co-operation demands unstinted admission of equality of men and women as members of society. That is real partnership, which rejects the traditional notion of the division of labour, of distinct fields of activity appropriated respectively for the sexes. Real partnership is possible only when the relation between husband and wife ceases to be that of the protector and the protected.

Nor is it only in the West that masses of women are compelled to share the economic responsibility of keeping up the family, to function as partners of men outside home. In India also, multitudes of women occupy a similar position; only, they remain deprived of the right which should be theirs legitimately, in return for the economic responsibility they shoulder. They do labour, and consequently contribute to the family exchequer; but they do not do so as independent individuals; they are treated as beasts of burden. All women belonging to the lower classes, particularly the peasantry, are in that position. The glorious ideal of Indian womanhood is not for them. For the bulk of Indian womanhood, the ideal stands naked as chattel-slavery.

Therefore, Desai did not know what he was talking about, when he advised women not to "enter the arena of the struggle for existence which belongs to man". Whatever may be the wisdom of this advice, given by our modern Draco, it certainly has no sense for the majority of Indian women, who are deeply involved in the struggle for existence, have been so from time immemorial, even in

the legendary Golden Age, not by choice, with any perverse spirit of antagonism, but out of stark necessity. Now, even the women belonging to the next higher stratum of society are being drawn in that struggle. Thanks to the break-down even of the precarious skeleton of the joint family, an increasingly large number of middle-class women are finding it difficult to have the traditional protection of husbands who, in return for that questionable privilege, could occupy the position of the lord and master of the family. When thousands of young men are defeated in the economic struggle for existence, for no fault of theirs, at least a corresponding number of women must look out for themselves. Middle-class women, in a progressively increasing number, shall be entering the arena of the struggle for existence, not by choice, but under compulsion. It is easy enough to warn them off; but what is the alternative? The kind concern for keeping the "weaker sex" out of the vicissitudes of the economic struggle for existence, may sound very magnanimous. But only the naive will be deceived by such cheap demagoguery. The cynically minded easily see the



significance of such modern paternalism. It is a denial of economic freedom to women. What the women are told, in effect, is: "You keep house for men, bear them children to inherit their property, and they will protect you; if you happen to be fortunate enough, you may even be pampered." In other words, the women are enjoined to be breeding machines, and per chance toys in exceptional cases; but not to complain. Because, that is their natural function. The cat is out of the bag.

The crucial question, however, is: How many women in contemporary India can have even the questionable privilege of the benevolent protection of man? How many men can honestly and confidently offer such protection? Very few in either case. That is a fact, and that fact alone is going to revolutionise the relation between man and woman, to compel the recognition of women, no less than that of men, as individuals, to promote the rise of a new type of family on the ruins of the old which, doomed by history, cannot be saved by simple idealisation.

The great bulk of women, those belonging to the labouring classes, have never enjoyed

the privilege, although they paid the price, and more. They have always been, not only housekeepers and breeding machines, but also beasts of burden, never toys. Thus, more than ninety per cent of the Indian manhood is not entitled to take up the paternalistic attitude towards women. They nevertheless do. That is the heritage of patriarchal culture. A palpable untruth has become a matter of current belief. Not only men tell the lie; women also believe in it. In either case, it is a matter of habit. Prejudice, fostered through ages by religion, and fortified by ignorance, makes them blind to the stark realities of daily life.

Now, the middle-class also is sinking down to the position of the masses living on manual labour. An increasingly large number of its male members find themselves unable to offer an economic security to women. So, the traditional protective or paternalistic attitude towards women remains a practical proposition only for the thin upper stratum of society—for those fortunate few who mostly live on unearned income or are engaged in well paid professions. Apart from the intrinsic injustice and immorality of this

old-fashioned attitude, it is idle to defend a relation that does not exist in reality, to hold up an ideal which cannot be reached, to advise women to remain content under male protection which, to the great majority of them, is no longer available. The reality of the situation is obscured by a fiction, and this is done purposely. The unrealisable ideal of paternalism is held up with the purpose of placing the modern women in the wrong, for maintaining that there is no legitimate ground for their discontent which is ascribed to their being lured by "false ideals borrowed from the West".



The desire of women to stand economically on their own feet, however, is a native growth. The legitimate ground for the desire always existed, the vast bulk of women having never been really dependent on men economically. Always as now, they have shared with men extra-domestic labour; but they were never allowed any proprietary right over the produce of their labour which legally belonged to men—the lords and masters of the family. When women are

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compelled to perform labour of economic value, they are legitimately entitled to share the ownership with men. The demand for the economic independence of woman is not a new-fangled idea; It is a demand for the redress of a wrong done to them throughout the ages. In addition to this perennial cause for the revolt of women, affecting them as an entire social group, there are new causes. These are also native; they generate in the dissolution of the joint family and the general economic distress of the middle-class.

The historically caused and socially necessary revolt of women, therefore, is not a nuisance created by some middle-class women corrupted by Western ideas. Though they are naturally occupied immediately with their own particular problems, these women, however, give expression to the long-standing grievance of the dumb masses of their sex. The problems confronting the middle-class women particularly cannot be solved without a radical reconstruction of society. Because, the problems originate in the decay of the established social order which, for ages, treated the vast bulk of women as beasts of burden. Thus, objec-

tively, the educated women rebelling against the ideals of Indian womanhood, are demanding a social revolution. No wonder that they are rebuked by the orthodox nationalists. But while condemning the "false ideals" of the modern woman, the defenders of the Indian ideal only expose the real nature of the latter.

The reactionaries say that the emancipation demanded by the misguided modern women would mean the disruption of home life, and bring about a social chaos. They misrepresent the idea of the freedom of sex-relation. Their stock-argument is that nature has made the woman different from man; so, there can be no equality between them. Desai, for example, informed his audience: "You cannot alter the creation of nature: A man will remain a man, a woman a woman." As if anybody ever disputed this truism. No woman wants physical transformation. The demand is not for manhood; it is for human rights, for the abolition of man-made codes and conditions that do not allow women to develop as individual human beings; it is for the creation of such a social and

domestic atmosphere as will enable women to act freely in the capacity of partners and companions of men.

Here is a clear statement of what the modern woman really strives for: "The women's movement has set to it the task of removing all sex-inequality wherever it exists, so as to bring that happy day of consummation nearer. All sex-discrimination must go wherever it may exist, and as a logical consequence of that, all exploitation must cease. That is the burden of the message of the Women's Conference."\*

What is the happy day which has become the ideal of the modern Indian woman? Let her describe, in order to dispel the bogey of sex-war: "The commonest misunderstanding is that the movement is supposed to create a rift between men and women by bringing into play a spirit of sex-rivalry, sex-competition and sex-war. It is argued that, instead of bringing about peace and harmony into an already distracted world, the movement creates new issues leading to

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\*(Presidential Address by Mrs. Brijlal Nehru to the annual meeting of the Delhi Women's Conference, November 8, 1936.)



dissensions between the two parts of humanity which are destined to live together a unitary life, and without whose co-operation the world cannot exist. To give this interpretation to the movement is to deny its objective, which is not to set woman against man, but to bring about peace and harmony and true co-operation between the two."

Who would fall foul of this objective, and yet claim to be the upholder of a noble ideal of womanhood? Perhaps the Indian apologist would contend that that exactly is the ideal of Indian womanhood. Well, the fact is that it is not. Let the testimony come from experience.

"Men and women have no doubt lived their lives together all over the world and at all time, but they have not lived together the lives of true companionship. There might have been a dead peace in their relationship, but that peace has not been the peace of life and harmony. There has been, from time immemorial, a spirit of superiority and inferiority in the relation between man and woman, of exploitation of woman by man. This spirit is manifest in the customs and manners, in the rules and laws, of our coun-

try. It has vitiated the relationship of the two, and has been the cause of inhuman evolution and has retarded human progress. True peace and harmony and real companionship between man and woman can exist only when the relation rests upon equality and justice. As long as there is the slightest idea of the master and the dependent, of the superior and the inferior, in the heart of men or in their customs and their practice and laws, the consummation of human bliss and evolution, which can be found in perfect harmony and co-operation between man and woman, cannot be achieved.”\*

In the Hindu family, the woman is dependent. The ideal of womanhood does not change that; it is a mere myth. Laws as well as practices are all full of the spirit of inequality and injustice. The natural equality of sexes can be re-established through the problematical revival of polyandry. Dogmatic defenders of justice and equality should demand that right for women, if the privileges enjoyed by men under Hindu law are not to be abolished. But polyandry will surely break up the family. That was the

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\*Ibid.

established custom once upon a time. But no modern woman demands its revival. What is demanded is a freedom of choice, the right to separate when there is no harmony. In the last analysis, economic freedom is the basic demand. That is the only way out of the impasse created by the break-down of an old social order. Justice as well as general social welfare demands the establishment of that freedom on the part of women. Indeed, the freedom demanded by the modern woman alone can prevent the dissolution of the family as a necessary social institution, and head off the danger of a social chaos. The modern woman does not want to create a social chaos. She has been thrown in the midst of one. She is only trying to get out of it. Let her not be handicapped by the load-stone of the fictitious ideal of Indian womanhood, tied around her neck.

## II

### Some Random Reflections

I am neither a hero-worshipper nor a blind devotee. I am not afraid of telling the truth, whether agreeable or disagreeable. It may hurt some; but recently, the metaphysical conception of truth has become a part of the Congress creed. So let the truth, and nothing but the truth, be told frankly. Otherwise, truth may be made out of falsehood. What is truth? Correspondence with reality. What is reality? Objective existence—that which exists by itself. What is existence? Change. What does not change, does not exist. Ergo, change is the only truth. To change is to be true. Truth is not immutable. The corollary of this axiom is that absolute truth is a falsehood.

Lie-hunting is my profession. This is a thankless job. But someone must tell the truth, if it is not to remain an empty concept. I have been lie-hunting ever since

I learned to think for myself-to distinguish facts from fictions. It has not won me popularity. The practice of suffering and sacrifice is not appreciated by the preachers of those virtues. I do not believe in them. Yet, not as a duty, but as a part of the game, I have made some sacrifice. Perhaps, that meant some suffering also. But having no martyr-complex, I did not experience any feeling of suffering. It happened all as a matter of course, without any advertisement or ostentation.

The best part of a whole life is not a negligible thing specially when it was equipped with the ability to achieve personal aggrandisement, if I was so inclined. Even political fame, beyond the confines of my own country, was well within my reach. It is not vanity for me to believe that, in pursuit of personal gain, in the gross material sense, I could easily get at the top of any profession I should have chosen. Instead, I preferred the path which, after fifteen years of exile, led me to six years of imprisonment, the rigour of which perhaps shall reduce my life by many more years.

Expressing pity for me in this position,

Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his Autobiography that "nationalist India has no use for him." That is a damaging remark—for "nationalist India", not for me. It exposes the real nature of the "nationalist India", Nehru refers to. I am not a Gandhist; but is nationalism identical with Gandhism? Who would challenge the fact that my whole life, however insignificant it might be, has been devoted to the cause of national freedom? Why, then, nationalist India has no use for me? Because I advocate "Swaraj for the ninety-eight per cent", which admittedly is not the ideal of the nationalist India Nehru refers to. I am not much concerned with the attitude of that nationalist India, composed of talkative and vain-glorious Gandhists.) The real nationalist India, that is, the India in the throes of a great revolution, is a different thing, and she has some use for me.

I have not been hailed as a leader; nevertheless, none can deprive me of the satisfaction offered by the fact that many of the leaders of the nationalist India which has no use for me are tending to-day towards the direction I indicated years ago, when they

believed in the Mahatma's miraculous power to win Swaraj in one year or to return from the Round Table Conference with the charter of Indian independence dictated by him.

The Congress has adopted the idea of the Constituent Assembly. As far back as 1927, I suggested that the agitation against the Simon Commission should be conducted with the demand for a Constituent Assembly. Then as now, the great leaders of "nationalist India" had no use for an insignificant person who dared disagree with them. It is foolish to shed tears over spilled milk; but one must learn from experience. It can be reasonably asserted that, had the demand for the Constituent Assembly been raised and persistently pressed from the time I suggested it, the political situation of the country might be entirely different to-day. Even in 1931, I found Congress leaders decidedly opposed to the idea of a Constituent Assembly. On the other hand, orthodox Communists denounced me as a bourgeois nationalist democrat for advocating the slogan. To-day it has been taken up by both the sides. Those who came to scoff, have stayed to pray. Only, one still has no

use for me, as Nehru informs, and others still call me a "renegade".

I have been abandoned to my fate by the preachers of the virtue of suffering and sacrifice, although these patriotic heroes were living comfortable lives while, a quarter of a century ago, still a mere boy, I had undergone imprisonment for pioneering activities for the liberation of our country. But Imperialism appears to take particular notice of me—forsaken and friendless, as I am to-day. My imprisonment has not been a cheap price for applauded martyrdom. It has ruined my health, but my spirit remains uncrushed. As a matter of fact, I am encouraged by this barbarous and vindictive treatment. It enhances my self-confidence, and affords me the feeling of satisfaction that, though not recognised publicly, my contributions to the cause of freedom have not been altogether negligible.

I shall keep on hunting lies. It is too late to seek popularity; and fortunately, I do not possess sufficient intellectual mediocrity to qualify for the dubious distinction. To exploit popular ignorance and to encourage false vanity, are the easiest steps to the



pedestal of leadership in this country.

More often than not, popular leaders are misleaders. Easy popularity is attained by those who share the ignorance and prejudices of the masses. They are more popular and more easily successful, because they either consciously deceive their followers, or reflect their ignorance and prejudices; and tradition makes the followers more inclined to be misled. Blind faith in traditional dogmas creates the disposition to be easily misled. Since the revolt against the past is the condition for the conquest of the future, the pioneers of progress are not likely to be popular. Indeed, they should regard popularity, if the fickle goddess appears to smile upon them, as the warning that, exhausted by the unspectacular uphill task, they are deviating into some path of least resistance.

Practically all the outstanding makers of history were more or less obscure before the great events which were brought about partially by their efforts, and placed them in the position to make substantial contributions to the shaping of the destiny of mankind. When Miliukoffs and Kerenskis, for example, were basking in the sun of

popularity, being acclaimed by the world as the liberators of the Russian people whom they betrayed before long, Lenin was an obscure person, known only to the small circle of immediate associates as the real man of destiny. Yet, to-day, the world knows that no other single individual has contributed to the cause of the liberation of the Russian people even a fraction of what he did during the period of his comparative obscurity. His final appearance as the leader of the revolution was not inevitable. Themselves creatures of history, men do determine historical events. But there is no law which guarantees that all, who help bring about great decisive historical events, should be recognised by history. In that respect, history is rather capricious. Those who, by virtue of having aided the development of the objective forces thereof, could be called makers of revolutions, do not necessarily appear as such, always in history. The centre of the stage laboriously set by them may be occupied by others. To have helped the rise of these leaders, constitutes a part of their contribution to the making of history. But that fact may never be realised,

much less recognised.

The makers of history may not always appear as popular heroes, even when events are actually shaped in the way indicated by them. A Lenin, for example, is a historical rarity. None of the heroes of the French Revolution—neither Robespierre nor Danton nor even Marat—were the fathers of the revolution in the sense as Lenin was of the particular revolution with which he was connected. The former were all children of the revolution, the development of which had been aided by others who never emerged from the obscurity in which the makers of history usually remain. When a revolution is fortunate to be led by its father, as the Russian was, there is little danger of its being miscarried, owing to the ineptitude of the leadership, provided by her spoiled children whom she may consume in rage.

Not wishing, nor being in the position, to qualify for the favour of the goddess of popularity, I shall keep at the thankless, but very necessary task of lie-hunting.



Philosophically, I am not an idealist. But

one need not believe in the metaphysical sovereignty of ideas, and yet admit that, once formed spontaneously (ideation is a physiological process) or instilled artificially into consciousness, ideas determine human action, to a very large extent. Hence the decisive role of ideology in the development and ultimate success of any political or social movement. And every political movement of the least historical significance is actuated with a social purpose. Its character is naturally determined by its objective.

What is the social purpose of Indian nationalism? Until and unless this question is courageously answered, the political professions of the nationalist movement will remain a mass of contradictions; vague ideals will be set up only to be betrayed in action; mass energy, mobilised on false promises, will be dissipated in futile demonstrations; in short, confusion as regards the social objective will cloud its political perspective, and impede progress towards the desired goal of national independence.

A political revolution takes place only as the prelude to a social renaissance. This is an empirical law of history, and as such

binding for India as well as for the rest of the world. So, if politically the nationalist movement is revolutionary, its social purpose must be to clear away the established order of decayed institutions, so that a new structure can be raised in the place of the old. Conversely, the nationalist movement demands a radical change in the political state of the country, because such a change will create legal conditions sanctioning the readjustment of the property relations necessary for a social renaissance. The nationalist movement is politically revolutionary, in so far as the masses of the population are concerned; nationalism is the expression of the objective urge, not yet consciously felt, for social progress; and it goes without saying that progress means forward movement, not return to some old position. The dominant ideology of our nationalist movement is antagonistic to the social purpose which makes it politically revolutionary. As human activities ordinarily are determined by preconceived ideas, encumbered with its present creed-adherence to the traditions of a dead past, the Indian nationalist movement will never advance towards the goal of political independence.

Indeed, the reactionary social orientation has transformed the ideal of political independence into a demagogic, fraudulent, profession.

If the historical necessity of a social renaissance is not admitted, political revolution becomes a matter of idle talk, useless, at any rate. So long as the ideology of nationalism does not admit that necessity, the nationalist movement politically is bound to seek some compromise with Imperialism, or worse still, be positively counter-revolutionary. Both the tendencies are there easily to be discerned by those who are not deluded by demagogy or infatuated by shibboleths. The ideal of complete political independence is not necessarily a revolutionary ideal. If the national State is going to be an instrument for the perpetuation of the established social order, or for a revival of older institutions, its establishment will not be a political revolution, but a counter-revolution. Every political change is not revolutionary; often it is counter-revolutionary. Its historical significance lies in the social object with which, and for which, it is brought about. Indian nationalists have

still to learn this elementary lesson of politics.

Even the most pretentious of our nationalist leaders believe that bloodshed makes any political upheaval revolutionary. Political changes, obviously and admittedly in the retrograde direction, not only socially, but even in respect of the rights of citizenship, are also regarded by them as revolutions. Thus, the bloody suppression of parliamentary democracy in Italy and the even more bloody "constitutional" destruction of the German Republic, are considered to be events of historical significance similar to that, for example, of the overthrow of the monarchy in Spain or even the Russian Revolution.

If national independence will not equip the masses of people with such political and legal rights as they have not hitherto enjoyed, the struggle for political freedom, even when carried on courageously with all means, including armed uprising, will not acquire any revolutionary significance. The overthrow of imperialism by a movement under the slogan "Back to Manu" or even "Back to the villages" will be a counter-revolution.

Fortunately, such a socially counter-revolutionary movement has little chance of succeeding politically. The bitter experience of the nationalist movement since the advent of Gandhi has clearly demonstrated that. And should it succeed by any chance, India would be led neither back to Manu nor to Arcadian simplicity. Politically, it would establish an undemocratic regime on the model of the Fascist dictatorship. The traditions of ancient culture would be fully exploited for the purpose. Socially, however, the "new" regime would be a bad imitation of the demagogically denounced, but furtively coveted, "Western materialism" which is another name for capitalist exploitation. It would be a bad imitation because, in the first place, there would be no democratic freedom, nor the cultural progress associated with a normal capitalist development. Secondly, it would be a monstrous hybrid between capitalism and feudalism. "Purna Swaraj", under the tricolour of orthodox nationalism, if ever realised, will be a ruinous, extremely unstable, regime of exploitation of the masses by an unholy alliance precisely of those social forces which



to-day are marshalled against the forces of freedom, on the side of Imperialism. It will be a dictatorship of a coalition of the big capitalists, princes and the landlords. As all these together constitute a minute minority of the nation, the new regime must be maintained by violence, and may find it convenient to secure the protection of some imperialist power at the cost of national sovereignty. Nationalist China presents the tragic picture of the regime that may be the fate of India also, if she will have the misfortune of attaining the "Purna Swaraj" of the orthodox nationalists.

This is neither a morbid fancy nor sheer extravagance. We need only catch our leaders in unguarded moments to get a glimpse of the goal they really have in view. Unfortunately, few of them, with all their professed love for truth, are plain-spoken. Yet, quite frequently, the cat jumps out of the bag. I should say it once again that this criticism does not imply any doubt about personal honesty. I am not concerned with the character of this or that individual leader. The object of my criticism is a body of preconceived ideas which have so far effec-

tively hindered the development of our struggle for freedom, and will continue to do so unless they are completely discarded. And that will not happen until it is exposed that these ideas are not so noble, virtuous, altruistic and spiritual as they are made out to be. The fact that they happen to be advocated by men and women, whose moral integrity and humanitarian motive may not be doubted, adds to the traditional glory of these hackneyed shibboleths. Therefore, the criticism must be all the more searching, thoroughly iconoclastic. The ideas and doctrines themselves should be dissected with a scientific rigour; they should be carried to their logical consequence. Then and only then shall we be able to judge whether they are helpful or harmful for the purpose of our struggle for freedom. If they are found to be harmful, they should be courageously discarded, and the persons still defending them must follow suit, whatever may be their individual merit. Ideas guide action; so let us clarify our ideas. Only then, effective action will be possible.

I said that, let alone any radical change in the present structure of society, orthodox

nationalism rules out even political democracy; that its triumph would mean the establishment of the most reactionary type of dictatorship under the cover of benevolent paternalism, which would try to bolster up the most parasitic form of exploitation on the pretext of social harmony. There is plenty of evidence indicating that way. Lately, we have heard a lot of objections to Socialism,—some wise, some demagogic, others frankly capitalistic. Look closely at these objections, and you will find that they are not objections to Socialism, but to democratic freedom—even of the kind established by capitalism. The Congress Socialists have failed to expose the undemocratic nature of the opposition to their propaganda which has greatly lost its force for that reason. In India, to-day, the advocates of the greatly belated social renaissance should stand on the platform of democracy. Political and social changes necessary for the establishment of democratic freedom will amount to a profound revolution. It is vaguely realised by those who say that political freedom must precede economic emancipation. But the economic tasks of a movement cannot be so

separated from its political programme. It is a grave mistake, pregnant with dangerous consequences, to differentiate economic problems from the political issues of the movement. The Congress President (Jawaharlal Nehru) is making this mistake. Does he believe that political power captured by the Congress under its present leadership, assuming that it is possible, which it is not, will in any way facilitate the realisation of his socialist ideals? If he does, he is woefully mistaken. He cannot ignore the fact that most of the Congress leaders are bitterly opposed to his ideal. How can he possibly believe that these people would be less hostile when they would have the power to combat what they consider to be a danger? In power, their opposition to his ideals would be active and effective.

You cannot place political and economic problems in watertight compartments, to be solved separately. The fundamental problems of nationalism are no less economic than those of Socialism. The former is no more a purely political movement than the latter is purely economic. The distinction between the two is that the economic tasks

of the one are not identical with those of the other. If by the declaration, that he does not propose to force Socialism on the Congress, Nehru means that he does not expect the nationalist movement to accomplish the economic tasks of Socialism, he is certainly right. But then he should set before the Congress the specific economic task of nationalism, which is the programme of bourgeois revolution. Unfortunately, he seems to be confusing this latter with Socialism, and thus giving the Congress leaders the opportunity for evading the economic issues of the nationalist movement.

As long as the Congress remains indifferent to the economic issues of nationalism, it will not advance towards its political goal. The agrarian problem is the economic basis of the national revolution. It is not a socialist problem. The realisation of Socialism is not an immediate issue. But revolution is not a distant goal. And the bourgeois revolution is also a social revolution; its programme is an economic programme. Why not emphasise on that programme, and lay aside Socialism as far as the Congress politics is concerned? If the Congress does not stand on

the platform of bourgeois revolution, it will never achieve political freedom. To make of nationalism a purely political movement, oblivious of, and even hostile to, its specific economic task, is to emasculate it. The Congress seems to be heading towards that disgraceful end. By separating it from economics, a mere illusion is made of the goal of political freedom.

All the outstanding leaders of the Congress, with their verbal concern for the welfare of the peasant masses, are stout defenders of landlordism. The Congress policy on this crucial socio-economic problem was for the first time explicitly stated in the official programme of the Swaraj Party which glorified the land-owning classes as the pillars of Indian society and culture, disowning all intention to impair their position in any way. It won't do to argue that the Swaraj Party was not the Congress. For, in the first place, orthodox no-changers did not dissociate themselves from the Swarajist social programme; in the second place, the party always functioned as an integral part of the Congress, and eventually captured its leadership completely. However, any number

of pronouncements on the part of authoritative Congress leaders in support of the policy of defending landlordism could be cited. Whenever the landlords express dissatisfaction with the activity of radical nationalists, some Congress leader or other hastens to reassure them that the Congress does not want to harm them. Of course, these reassurances about their parasitic privileges are usually accompanied by an appeal to them to be good. The spread of democratic and socialistic ideas in the nationalist rank and file irritates, annoys and alarms the landlords. Therefore, the Congress leaders find themselves compelled to make repeated pronouncements repudiating the growing demand for the abolition of the ruinous, feudal or semi-feudal system of landownership.

One single fact should dispel any possible doubt on this score. It is Gandhi's view on the question. In ordinary political circumstances, his view might be regarded as a personal opinion, because he is supposed to have severed his connection with the Congress. But his much advertised resignation of the Congress membership is a mere formality. He is still the dictator of Congress

policy,—“its permanent super-president”. Moreover, the titular president himself makes the statement that “Gandhiji is the Congress”. So, his view must be regarded as the decisive factor in the determination of any policy of the Congress. To be on the safest ground, I shall state Gandhis’ views in Nehru’s words: “But to my surprise I have discovered during the last year or so that Gandhiji approves of the taluqdari system as such and wants it to continue.” (Autobiography, page 535) The discovery is much too belated, and it is surprising that even Nehru could make it only during the last year or so. For, already in 1934, while addressing a meeting of the U. P. landlords, Gandhi made the following declaration quoted by Nehru himself: “Better relations between landlord and peasant could be brought about by a change of heart on both sides. If that was done, both could live in peace and harmony”. He was never in favour of abolition of the taluqdari or zemindari system. He is further reported to have said: “I shall be no party to dispossessing propertied classes of their private property without just cause. My objective is to reach your



heart, and convert you, so that you may hold all your property in trust for your tenants, and use it primarily for their welfare. But supposing that there is an attempt unjustly to deprive you of your property, you will find me fighting on your side.” (Autobiography)

As regards the doctrine of trust, Nehru has made a searching analysis of it, to lay bare its hypocrisy. Even previously, already in May 1931, after his interview with the Governor of the U. P., Gandhi had stated the above views in a manifesto to the landlords and peasants. In that, he called upon the peasants to pay up the rents to the best of their ability. Curiously enough, in his Autobiography, Nehru makes only a bare reference to that famous document. No wonder that the trusting admirer, if not quite a disciple, is perplexed by the “paradoxes” of Gandhism. He writes: “With all his (Gandhi’s) keen intellect and passion for bettering the down-trodden and oppressed, why does he support a system, and a system which is obviously decaying, which creates this misery and waste? He seeks a way out, it is true. But is not that way to the past barred and

bolted? And meanwhile, he blesses all the relics of the old order which stands as obstacle in the way of advance-the feudal States, the big zemindaris, taluqdaris, the present capitalist system." (Autobiography page 528)

Is it not surprising that, though he himself realises the rank reactionary social significance of Gandhi's social views, Nehru should be so very displeased with those who have the courage to tell the truth? Even to-day, he finds a justification for the Gandhist approach to the social problems which he can no longer approve. He would still respect a patently reactionary ideology as "the pure religious attitude to life and its problems". If that is so, then the sooner nationalist politics is freed of this pure religious attitude, the better. No progressive, not to mention revolutionary, person can admire, respect or condone this attitude, and yet claim honesty in his professions of Socialism.

I just read a public statement by Nehru on "Congress and Socialism", in which he quotes the following passage from Gandhi's speech at the Round Table Conference:

“Above all, the Congress represents in its essence the dumb semi-starved millions, no matter whether they come from British India or what is called Indian India. Every interest which, in the opinion of the Congress, is worthy of protection, has to subserve the interests of these dumb millions. If there is a genuine real clash of interests, the Congress will sacrifice every interest for the sake of the interests of the dumb millions.”

Those are admirable sentiments, and I do not doubt for a moment their sincerity, although I remember having publicly pointed out at the time that certain other pronouncements of Gandhi, made immediately before or after the above, cancel the possibility of any action commensurate with those sentiments. However, that again did not imply any doubt about the sincerity of Gandhi's lofty humanitarianism. My point, now as then, is that it is not a question of sincerity, but a matter of logic; that the undoubted humanitarian sentiments of Gandhi are contradicted and rendered ineffective by his ethical principles and the religious approach to social problems. If he meant what he said at the Round Table Conference, (and I

for one shall always believe that he did when he said it), how are those sentiments to be reconciled with his proclaimed determination to defend the interests of the propertied classes if they are ever attacked?

The readiness of the Congress to defend the interests of the dumb millions, therefore, is not so conclusive as it appears to be. Indeed, it is clearly hypothetical; the condition is "if there is a genuine real clash of interests." Here we are up against the orthodox nationalist doctrine that under no condition should there be any struggle between classes. The brute fact that class antagonism is the fundamental feature of the established social order is conveniently overlooked. The condition "if there is a genuine real clash" implies that, in the opinion of the Congress, no such clash exists, and there is no reason why it should ever take place. There is only one way to avoiding the clash breaking out, sooner or later. It is to persuade the dumb millions to remain dumb forever; to be resigned to their lot, and to make a virtue of the resignation which provides the guarantee for the privileges enjoyed by the upper classes. Class struggle can be

avoided only by persuading the exploited to accept social slavery as a providential arrangement.

The glorified tradition of spiritualist culture has so long served this mundane purpose, and may serve yet for some time. Given the doctrine that, in the Indian society, there is no clash of interests, and that there must be social harmony within the framework of the established order, it logically follows that any clash, should it ever take place, must be regarded as not "genuine", but artificially fomented by the demoniac spirit of materialism, foreign to the Indian genius. For the observation of the traditional social relations, which alone are believed to guarantee harmony and inspire the higher ideals of life, the disturbing spirit and its manifestations should be suppressed. The result naturally would be defence of the established order by all means, should the dumb millions ever try to change it. And the world would be presented with the gratifying spectacle of violence practised for the vindication of the principle of non-violence. Whoever, on the dogmatic moral ground, debar the use of force in the struggle for the liberation of

the oppressed, even when the goal is otherwise unattainable, are always found to be practising violence, or conniving with the practice, for the suppression of the masses. There is absolutely no logical ground for the belief that our orthodox nationalists would behave differently. Their action will be determined by their ideology which invokes moral principles and religious sanction for the justification of a social order which guarantees to a minority privileges at the expense of the majority.



Commenting on the proceedings of the States People's Conference, recently held at Karachi, the "Servant of India" recollected the fact that, at the Round Table Conference, Gandhi had agreed that the decision of the method of electing representatives to the Federal Assembly should be left to "the good sense of the Princes." That amounted to delivering the dumb millions of the States to the tender mercies of the Princes, who are frankly against the election of those representatives, even by a restricted franchise. They insist upon their right to nomi-

nate them, and their right to do so has been recognised with the tacit consent of the Congress.

Yet, in one of his pronouncements, in London, I believe, Jawaharlal Nehru castigated the "arm-chair Socialists" for criticising Gandhi. It is difficult to understand who are ridiculed as the arm-chair Socialists. Presumably, those who only talk about Socialism. Nehru has been the most prominent among them in India. And it is not a disparaging remark, because before Socialism can be practised, or even established, there must be a good deal of talk about it, and the talk about Socialism necessarily means criticism of the reactionary and even opposing social ideas. It will be bad enough if Nehru means that those who only talk about Socialism had no right to criticise Gandhi. It would be worse still to denounce all critics of Gandhism as idle talkers.

I, for example, plead guilty to the charge of having been a persistent critic of Gandhism ever since its ominous shadow was cast over the political life of our country. But I would most emphatically refute the charge of being an arm-chair Socialist. I do not say that

Nehru had me particularly in mind when he castigated the critics of Gandhism. I know my place, and do not have the pretension of being remembered by the president-elect of the Congress, even to be castigated. I do not deserve such honour. Why should busy people think of a chap rotting in jail for the crime of having spent his entire life in modest efforts for promoting the cause of the freedom of India? Yet, it does seem rather strange to be so forgotten by those who talk so much about the virtues of suffering and sacrifice. I may not believe in the virtues. But I have had the perversity of practising them as much as anybody else—practising under no obligation, but voluntarily. Well, that is a different matter, and I could do a bit of experimenting with truth in that connection, if I wished. Perhaps, some day I would. Lie-hunting has always been my favourite pastime. It is immensely amusing to play the gadfly. But for the moment, I am intrigued by Nehru's attitude towards Gandhi, and wish to do a bit of interrogating about that paradox.

Of course, I am not at all concerned with their personal relation. The question I ask



is: Why are the critics of Gandhi to be despised as arm-chair Socialists? Nehru is at liberty to venerate the Mahatma; but how does he reconcile his Socialism with Gandhism? The Mahatma makes no secret of his views. He may or may not be a conscious reactionary. But he is certainly not a Socialist. Yet, any criticism of his well known socio-economic views, and activities in pursuance thereof, is dismissed as babbling of idle talkers, on the fictitious ground that, irrespective of his views, Gandhi is a practical Socialist. I do not believe that Nehru would assert to-day, as he might have done several years back, that Gandhi is the greatest Socialist in the world. But he does tell us a fiction in explanation of his paradoxical attitude towards Gandhi. The fiction is that Gandhi knows the peasant masses of India; and, by implication, Nehru maintains that the critics of Gandhi do not. Therefore, they are to be ridiculed as arm-chair Socialists. They do not know what they are talking about. I leave aside the charge of ignorance on the part of the critics of Gandhi, and grant the correctness of the charge; that would not make the asser-

tion about Gandhi's understanding of the agrarian situation any less groundless. If he really knew the condition of the Indian peasantry, and sincerely wanted to improve them, he could not possibly be such a stubborn apologist of the system which has reduced the peasant masses to their present intolerable condition.

I do not believe that personally Gandhi would ever go to the extent of actually travelling the way that must be travelled by all the adherents of the philosophy he preaches. He has actually been hailed as the Mussolini and Hitler of India by some of his idiotically enthusiastic admirers. But he would never live up to that expectation of the too exacting worshippers. Some of his apostles may fill up the bill. The important thing, however, is the logical consequence of his moralist doctrines which, as the quintessence of India's spiritualist tradition, have profoundly influenced the ideology of the nationalist movement. So much so that even the radical elements in the Congress, who, under the banner of an ill-conceived brand of Socialism, appear to be breaking away from the reactionary philosophy of

Gandhism, still remain committed to some of its curious creeds. Nehru, for example, moves in the vicious circle of self-contradiction, because of his inability to throw off the influence of Gandhism. This influence may yet be his undoing. It is really surprising that he cannot realise how obviously inconsistent are his socio-political views with his profession of the Gandhist creed of non-violence. His declared abhorrence for violence should make him see the clay-feet of the Gandhist God; because he is neither a knave nor a fool.



The nationalist movement cannot adopt a Socialist programme. But to be successful, nationalism must be inspired by a revolutionary social outlook. It must stand for a social revolution,—the establishment of democratic freedom, which is conditional upon a clean sweep of the ruins of a decayed feudal-patriarchal order, galvanised into a completely parasitic existence by its subservient alliance with Imperialism. The outstanding feature of the situation is that the nationalist movement is tied to an ideology

which commits it to the defence of the very social order which it is historically called upon to clear away. Its political programme, independence from foreign rule, is negatived by its reactionary social outlook which is justified by the hypocrisy of spiritualism. The political programme of a movement is bound to be determined by its social outlook. The nationalist leaders are opposed not only to Socialism; they are antagonistic to a democratic reconstruction of the Indian society. Consequently, every one of these pretentious fighters for "Purna Swaraj" is a sheep in tiger's skin. Their hands are voluntarily tied by a reactionary social philosophy. The nationalist movement must get rid of the potentially treacherous leaders, if it is to advance towards the goal of political freedom. The overthrow of the tin-gods will be hastened if their clay-feet are ruthlessly exposed, and the anti-nationalist essence of orthodox nationalism, expounded eruditely by the modern Rishis as "spiritual communism" or "Manuian Socialism" is laid bare for the benefit of their trusting followers. This is a thankless job. But some one must bell the cat.

Sanctimonious abhorrence of class struggle is the hall-mark of India's spiritualist culture. On that token, the struggle for national freedom must be taboo. Is there any plausible reason to believe that God wants harmony only on a national scale? If harmony among his children is the will of the Universal Father, the struggle for the liberation of any particular nation is just as objectionable as class struggle. Why should harmony between the exploiter and the exploited within a given national boundary be a nobler ideal than the harmony between those similarly related internationally? The spiritualist ideology of nationalism cannot give any convincing answer. Therefore, while talking pompously of Purna Swaraj, the Gandhist leaders are always ready for a compromise with Imperialism, if only they are given the chance. It is not their fault if they are not given the opportunity to show how beautifully the national problem could be solved thanks to their philosophy. One of the stalwarts of Gandhism, Kripalani, exclaimed the other day that, if the Government gives him a chance, Mahatma Gandhi would make a bloodless revolution in no time.

The class struggle is there. No sociologist worthy of the name has yet been able to disprove the verity of Marx's great discovery that the history of civilisation is the history of class struggle. India has experienced class struggle ever since her population set up a civilised society. Manu himself bears out the correctness of the assertion of Marx. The necessity of framing elaborate religious-ethical codes of social conduct does not arise in a society characterised by harmony. The object of legislation—religious, moral or secular—is to establish an equilibrium of discordant social elements, to create the appearance of social harmony, of peace and order, on a background of contradictions and antagonisms. Class struggle being the most characteristic feature of social organisation, built on any form of private property, the question is not about its reality, but about the attitude towards it.

The moralist, on the specious pretext of the fiction of harmony, says that the evil should not be encouraged. What does that amount to? Class struggle is the result of class domination,—exploitation and suppression of a section of the community by

another. Strictly speaking, not class struggle but class domination, is the fundamental feature of society based on private ownership of the means of the production of social requirements. Class struggle is inherent in such a social system, because to strive for overcoming the restrictions, placed upon the possibilities of growth, is a biological function. The desire to throw off the burden is but natural for the exploited and suppressed. The struggle for national freedom, which may involve "unethical" practices, derives its moral as well as historical justification from the biological necessity of growth. The suppressed may not always be in a state of revolt; as a matter of fact, often they are not even conscious of the necessity of freedom. In that case, society is considered to be in a state of harmony. Such harmoniousness of a social organisation, which is nevertheless pregnant with the germs of class struggle, is the monument to a temporary victory of the forces of selfishness over those of freedom and general progress. Class struggle, therefore, is not an evil. It is the expression of the spirit of freedom engendered by the biological necessity of growth. In

other words, class struggle is the lever of social evolution. That is the epoch-making discovery of Marx.

Therefore, any opposition to the historical necessity of developing class struggle, that is, of making the dumb, down-trodden multitude conscious of the latent desire for freedom, of inspiring them with the spirit to revolt against conditions which place restrictions upon their growth as human beings, is justifiable neither morally nor historically. It represents a denial of freedom. It is antagonistic to all progress. It springs, if not from baser motives, certainly from the deplorable failure to realise how the ideal of general welfare, professed by the moralists and humanitarians, could be attained.

It is a mistake to think that class struggle, the revolt of the oppressed, is a condition only for the establishment of Socialism. The struggle for democratic freedom is also a class struggle. Indeed, every chapter in the history of social evolution is opened up by the triumphant termination of a specific form of class struggle. Human society enters into a new stage of development, rises on a higher level of civilisation, whenever an established



relation of class domination is abolished through the successful revolt of the oppressed classes.

Any opposition to class struggle, in the given conditions of India, represents a negation of democratic freedom. For, the form of class struggle that India must experience, if she is to emerge out of the lingering twilight of decayed mediaevalism, is the struggle for democratic freedom. With the doctrine of social harmony, the Gandhists and the orthodox nationalists in general, are fighting the advent of democracy. This anti-democratic tendency, inherent in its spiritualist ideology, condemns the nationalist movement to impotence which may eventually lead it to a very dangerous as well as shameful position.

For justifying their reactionary social outlook, the nationalist leaders concoct curious theories of socio-political transformation. In addition to being the General Secretary, Kripalani is the political theorist of the Congress. Recently, in a letter to the "Statesman" he wrote: "The real meaning of the term (revolution) is any great change in the standards and values in the life of a

part of humanity. The change in Europe from mediaevalism to modernism is called a revolution. It does not mean that it was brought about by fire and sword. It only means that the values of mediaeval Europe changed, and the new values were embodied in new institutions. These institutions compared with the old were revolutionary."

It sounds so very learned,—all this sonorous sermon about values. But the woeful ignorance or wilful misreading of history is palpable. It reminds one of a staggering declaration once made by Maulana Shaukat Ali, when he used to carry the Mahatma on his broad shoulders. Proclaiming the efficacy of non-violence, the Big Brother said that the Bastille collapsed under the impact of that spiritual power!

Revolution, of course, is nothing more monstrous than a historically necessary socio-political change. Being inherent in the process of social evolution, there is no reason why it should be violent, any more than evolution itself is. But it happens that revolution is brought about by fire and sword. That is the undeniable experience of history. It is sheer nonsense to assert that

the transition from mediaevalism to modernism was a peaceful process in Europe, or that it will be so anywhere else. The heretical rebellions in Central Europe, the German Peasant War, the prolonged struggle of the Italian Republics against the Holy Roman Empire, the Great Revolution and the Civil War in England, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, and finally the revolutions of 1848—those were the most outstanding events which marked the transition. And they were not picnic parties nor prayer meetings. A most important fact is missed in Kripalani's misreading of history. It is the fact of counter-revolution. A revolution develops as a peaceful movement; but, because it represents the striving for a change of the "old standards and values", it naturally alarms the beneficiaries of the established socio-political structure, cemented by those standards and values. Eventually, they resort to the use of open violence in order to arrest the progress of peaceful social evolution necessary for general welfare. Counter-revolution introduces violence in a process of social change which otherwise need not be violent. /

But all these facts of history, past and present, have no significance for the political philosopher of the Congress. He stubbornly sticks to his theory, that revolution can happen as a miracle; and since the revolutionary movement in India is blessed with a saintly guidance, its success is bound to be miraculous. Kripalani further writes: "If India is to hold her own in any field of activity, revolutionary changes will certainly be necessary." This is very hopeful. But don't be elated. Listen to what follows: "Gandhiji is reported to have said that, if the Government helped him, he could work miracles. In plain political language, what he wanted to say is that, if the All-India Village Industries Association had the full and sympathetic support and co-operation of the Government, he would work a revolution. Revolution need not come through fire and sword, nor need it come through non-co-operation or through civil disobedience. It may come even through Government's help and co-operation. If true and genuine co-operation can be brought about with the help of the Government, it would be a miracle-in-modern language, a revolution."

So, after all, miracle, if it is ever to happen, will not be performed by the Saint. The deciding word rests with the other party. In 1929, the All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution, according to which "for their own purposes, the alien rulers of our country support the economic structure of society which is largely, if not entirely, responsible for the poverty and misery of the masses, and that therefore revolutionary changes in this structure are a condition for any appreciable improvement of the position of the masses." Kripalani also admits the merit of "revolutionary changes". But he asserts that these can be brought about painlessly with the co-operation of the alien rulers, whose very presence in this country is vitally associated precisely with the social structure that must be changed! He certainly does not believe that the British came to India as disinterested missionaries of civilisation. How, then, can they be expected to help the introduction of "revolutionary changes" in a structure from which they derive benefit? If a "revolution" will ever come with the joint efforts of those who will be injured by it, then that will be a miracle, indeed. The

expectation is not so absurd as it appears. Because, the "revolutionary changes" which are expected to take place miraculously, are not of the kind which is really necessary. They are to be changes in "standards and values", not in the economic structure of society. It is to be a "spiritual revolution", not a social reconstruction. This novel theory of revolution enables the Congress leaders to hide their real complexion. But it is a questionable kind of conscience which can be so easily squared with diametrically opposed points of view.



So we are going to have also a Civil Liberties Union in this country. Of course, we should be up-to-date in every respect. But a civil liberties union, composed mostly of people who do not believe in civil liberties, or whose idea of civil liberty is not far from a denial of it, and in a country where there is no civil liberty, is useless and romantic. Is it not Quixotism to take up the defence of something we do not possess? The believers in civil liberties must set about to conquer them at first. Otherwise, there

will be nothing for them to defend. The knight-errants and legal luminaries will be as quick to turn tail as they have been to join, if they are ever faced with the real issue. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru is a clever man. Therefore, he has refused to join. He seems to visualise the issue more clearly than the Congress President, who is patronising the new venture. Under the given conditions of the country, the question of civil liberties is bound to raise grave political issues, and unless those issues are joined, the projected Union will be an impotent show which will only deceive the gullible, half-baked, nationalist democrats. Those who are joining are no more democratic politically, and liberal socially, or less reactionary, than Sir Tej Bahadur. Only, they are not equally honest, and wish to be on the band-wagon in time as long as they are not required to do anything serious.

To move a resolution in the Legislative Assembly, as is periodically done, advising the Government to release political prisoners detained without trial, is to endorse the incarceration of those who have been tried and condemned. The logical implication of

this attitude is that these latter category of political prisoners should not be released, even when the opposition would have the power to set them free. If you confine yourself to the protest against detention without trial, you tacitly approve of political persecution done through law courts which themselves are weapons of coercion. There is no objection to the suppression of civil liberties; only let it be done legally. This is a novel method of defending civil liberty, and only those with a queer notion of civil liberty can adopt this method. The persecution of political offence is tolerable if it takes place legally. But the established method of making the laws, to which such fervent appeal is made, represents a denial of the most elementary principle of civil liberty. Why is the Goddess outraged by one kind of law (the Regulations and Ordinances are also law in the formalist Juridical sense), and propitiated if she is raped behind the thin screen of a different kind of law? Are the Sections 124-A and 121-A of the Indian Penal Code less coercive, less injurious, to civil liberties than the Criminal Amendment Act? Has the Indian Penal Code



any constitutional validity at all? Raise these obvious questions, and the pompous show of the Civil Liberties Union will fizzle out. If the show continues, it will only confuse real issues—do more harm than good.



The Congress, politically, seems to have discarded Gandhism; but philosophically, at the same time, it has included in its programme yet another of the Mahatma's metaphysical ideals. After all, truth has been added to non-violence as the fundamental creed of the Congress. One would naturally ask for a definition of this delightfully vague term. The Mahatma's "Experiment with Truth" offers little light to those who are not gifted with the spiritual genius of credulity. But those endowed with the faculty of criticism can occasionally detect the Saint stating what truth really is. The latest occasion was his sermon to the mill-hands of Ahmedabad, asking them to accept a wage cut.

Having praised the agreement reached at Delhi in January 1935, under his influence, between the representatives of the mill-

owners and the workers' spokesmen, he writes the following: "I hope you will accept the agreement, in which the proposal for reducing wages has been admitted in your behalf. I have no doubt whatsoever that you will lose nothing as a result of this, and your dignity will grow, on the contrary. It is of no importance that the agreement admits the principle for the realisation of which we have been trying for the last four years. Now it is necessary to prepare for the translation of this principle into action. I need not mention that this will depend on how far your efforts in this respect will be actuated by good motives. Those who know that both the owners and workers can be benefitted by the development of the mill industry, will never doubt the propriety of this agreement. Since I came in connection with you, I have never tired in saying that the mill industry is not only for the owners, but also for the workers. The owners have invested their capital in the industry. Your capital is labour. Therefore, one party cannot work without the co-operation of the other. If you realise this truth, then you will see that the agreement will protect the:

interests both of the owners and the workers."

Just when the Apostle of Truth was giving this illuminating insight into the nature of his truth, the Congress Working Committee incorporated the new metaphysical concept into its official language, thereby divesting the goal of Purna Swaraj of all political content. At the same time, together with the resolution threatening individual members and whole local organisations with disciplinary action, to the extent of expulsion, for not submitting completely to the dictatorship set up by the amended Constitution of the Congress, the Working Committee passed another resolution, calling upon the country to celebrate the "Independence Day". The resolution is of historic importance, (negatively), because it reduces the contribution of the people, to the imaginary struggle for the fictitious goal of independence, to a pious wish. The masses must not act, because they have the deplorable tendency to expose that a political movement cannot be fitted neatly into an ethical framework manufactured by the idiosyncracies of one man. The powers behind the throne of the uncrowned

king of the Congress do not want any real mass struggle which always tends to be "dangerous". The masses, therefore, should only wish Purna Swaraj and give full power of attorney to the leaders to act in their name. The stage for action is now evacuated for the new troupe which promises to present the magical spectacle of parliamentary acrobatics. The resolution is further of interest as an illuminating interpretation of the cult of "truth" introduced into politics. Let it be emphasised that I do not say that there can be no truth in politics. But truth as a metaphysical concept has no more place in politics than in any other walk of life. Those who run after metaphysical shadows or preach a hypocritical cult, disregard the real truth. Truth is correspondence with objective reality. In so far as politics is a highly realistic occupation, it has a foundation of truth.

According to the resolution of the Working Committee, adopted in its meeting at Delhi in January 1935, the following "Mantra" is to be recited on the "Independence Day" by every Congressman: "On this day, we remind ourselves that complete independence

is our birth-right, and that we shall not rest until the principle is realised. For realising this principle, we shall, to the best of our power, observe truth and non-violence—in thought, speech and act, and shall be ready to make the greatest sacrifice. Having taken the vow of truth and non-violence, we shall: 1. Endeavour to establish heart felt unity among the different communities, and to promote the spirit of equality disregarding caste and religion; 2. Preach temperance; 3. Make propaganda for the charkha and village industry, and ourselves use khaddar and other articles produced by village industries; 4. End untouchability; 5. Serve the crores of our hungry country-fellows; and 6. Do other national and constructive works.” It is desired that this day is spent in constructive work and taking firm resolution to try for Purna Swaraj.

✓ Purna Swaraj is no longer a political objective. It is a principle to be realised through ethical purity. So, we have reverted to what the Mahatma preached in 1921—purification of the soul is the only way to Swaraj, or Swaraj is a mental state. The people must make firm determination, but they are not to

do anything. What are the "efforts" to be made, is left delightfully vague. The vow of truth and non-violence clears the Congress movement of all political content, and reduces it to an order of *Tapasyis*, given to social services which again are impractical. The one point (5) which says something concrete is also left utterly vague. It is full of empty words or even consummate hypocrisy, unless accompanied with a concrete programme of action. The last sentence is highly significant and positively dangerous. The masses are not to act, but to wish and pray. The potentially revolutionary forces, gathered under the Congress banner, are to be emasculated through political passivity. And co-operation with British Imperialism is no longer a future perspective; It has already begun.

In an official statement about the new method adopted by the Congress, the General Secretary explained it as the plan "to follow the path of Mussolini and Hitler in the conquest of majority. At the same time, in a letter to the "Statesman", the chief casuist of the Gandhist Church expounded a novel theory of revolution and pointed out how it

could be practically applied to India. "Revolution need not come through fire and sword, nor need it come through non-co-operation or civil disobedience. It may come even through Government's help and co-operation. None will be more glad than Gandhiji, essentially a man of peace, if it can come through Government's help and co-operation. He has said on many occasions that he was dying for co-operation, and his non-co-operation was for the sole purpose that honourable co-operation may be possible. If true and genuine co-operation can be brought about with the help of the Government, it would be a miracle—in modern language: a revolution. . . . So far as constitutional methods are concerned, they have been tried and found wanting. If the Government, however, want to put life in those old and effete methods, let them give full effect to the resolution carried by the representatives of the people in the new Assembly. That is the way of reasoned argument and co-operation. That is the way to kill the civil disobedience movement. The other way by which it can be killed is a violent revolution, disastrous in its effects both on the people

and on the Government."

This "forceful argument for constitutional methods", as the "Statesman" characterised the Congress Secretary's letter, also amounts to the declaration that the country is heading towards a revolution, the masses are getting conscious of the necessity for a revolutionary change, but we Congress leaders do not want a revolution, we appeal to the Government to give us the opportunity to co-operate in heading off the catastrophe; let the Government beware of the danger, and take our advice.

There was nothing even very remotely revolutionary in the resolution carried by the new Assembly. The last sentence of Kripalani's letter is very ambiguous. Either revolution is confounded with counter-revolution, and whoever makes such a confusion is utterly incapable of appreciating the historic significance of revolution, or it inadvertently lets the cat out of the bag. The Congress leadership considers the interests of the Indian people and of the British Government identical, vis-a-vis the danger of a revolution. Read "the upper classes" in the place of "the people"; otherwise, the



statement makes no meaning. The mass movement developing under the Congress flag is the expression of a socio-political discontent. If it is not controlled with the help of its leaders, who are to be placated with the grant of a share in the political power and economic privileges, it will lead to a revolution.



Referring to the efforts to relieve the victims of the Quetta earthquake Gandhi writes: "All this and much more along the same lines can never be a substitute for prayer. But why at all? Does not God know what has happened? Does he stand in need of prayer to enable him to do his duty? No. God needs no reminder. He is within everyone. Nothing happens without his permission. Our prayer is a heart-searching. It is a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless without prayer, a definite recognition that the best human endeavour is of no effect if it has not God's blessing behind it. Prayer is a call to humility. It is a call to self-purification. I must repeat what I said at the time of the Bihar disaster. There

is a divine purpose behind every physical calamity. That perfected science will one day be able to tell us beforehand when earthquakes will occur, as it tells us to-day of eclipses, is quite possible. It will be another triumph of human mind. But such triumphs, even indefinitely multiplied can bring no purification of self, without which nothing is of any value. I ask those who appreciate the necessity of inward purification to join in prayer that we may read the purpose of God behind the vicissitudes, that they may humble us and prepare us to face our Maker whenever the call comes, and that we may be ever ready to have the suffering of our fellows, whoever they may be."

I shall do no more than record this pronouncement, which is only a platitudinous repetition of the age-worn doctrines which have enslaved the Indian people spiritually and reduced them to their present plight. If every calamity on this earth is the expression of a divine purpose, why complain against the present political state of our country? According to the supreme leader of the nationalist movement, in so far as it is represented by the Congress, the desire for

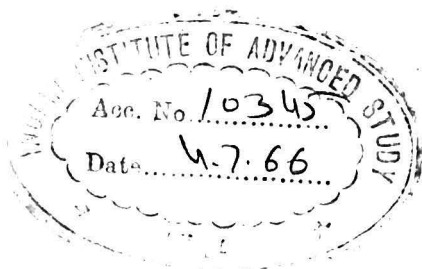
national freedom is a revolt against the purpose of God.



Shortly afterwards, the country was blessed with another demonstration of sublime wisdom which, by the way, was a commentary on the above pronouncement of the Mahatma. Speaking at the Kayastha Pathshala of Allahabad on January 7, 1935, on the national problem of India, Sahebji Maharaj of Dayalbagh said: "I believe that the fate of nations, as well as of individuals, is predetermined by God who is omniscient and kind. I believe that everything in the world happens according to divine dispensation, and that God has set a beneficent goal before the human society towards which it is going." Applying this teleological doctrine to history, the speaker declared that the Aryans came to India and subjugated the natives according to the will of God. Logically, the speaker declared, that the Muslim and British conquests of India took place also under divine dispensation. This view of history, which logically follows from the pet dogmas of the Mahatma, must look upon

the striving for national freedom as a revolt against the will of God—as a desire to disturb the harmony of divine dispensation. The speaker, therefore, reduced the national problem to the realisation of brotherly love between the rulers and the ruled, and he delivered himself of the following wisdom: “Your modern education can make people clever, but not happy. Your modern democratic rights can make people powerful, but not self-controlled. The more you accumulate earthly goods, the greater becomes the desire for them, and you are never satisfied. It is evident that everybody in this world cannot possess motor cars and horses, nor can everyone be a multi-millionaire.” The social significance of this “spiritualist” view of life is obvious. It is slavery in real life, in exchange for the hope of an imaginary liberation. As long as the movement for Indian freedom remains burdened with such a philosophy, it is bound to stultify itself.

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