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Some Views on the Ideal of a 'Responsible Society' for India

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The term 'Responsible Society' denotes the attempt of the World Council of Churches' Study Commission on Society to define an ideal of society for our age which is different from individualistic Capitalism and totalitarian Communism; an ideal which on the one hand is informed by the Christian insight into the nature of man as a person destined for responsible living in society, and on the other does adequate justice to the nature of the sociological revolution brought about by modern technics. My attempt in this article will be to examine some of the features of a similar ideal that has emerged in India and to evaluate its power to achieve the ideal. In reality, my aim is no more than to survey the attempt of those who reject the *laissez faire* ideology of Capitalism and the totalitarian answer of Communism, to define their ideal of what is broadly called Socialism. This does not mean that one is talking all the time about the Indian Socialist Party and its ideology. While it is true that the socialists of the I.S.P. form the organized expression of this ideology, the ideology itself has a broader basis, finding expression also in Nehru and the National Planning Committee of the Government under the leadership of the Indian National Congress, as well as Vinoba Bhave and the other leaders of the more orthodox Gandhian school of social thought. The recognition of the necessity of a social revolution for justice and a search after the most human means to achieve it without turning it into a new oppression, are common to all the representatives of this 'idea'.

A New Discipline of Responsibility

Asoka Mehta, the secretary of the Socialist Party of India, speaking at the Madras Congress of the Party in 1951 on the fundamentals of socialism says that both capitalist individualism and communist collectivism depersonalize man. With the impact of the machine, says Mehta, the traditional village pattern with its 'organic bonds between man and land and among men *inter se* have snapped', and the alienated individual in an industrialized society has to live his life of utter loneliness which terrifies and dehumanizes him. 'In the modern urban and industrial agglomerations, not only is there no natural bond between man and nature—the sonatas and symphonies of the wider life around

man are hushed in the cities of today—but there is also neither the free, tacit communion between man and man. Sympathy and antipathy are emotions that man understands and responds to, but indifference freezes him. In the modern world the prickly thorns of indifference is the normal lot of an urban man. 'I came into the city and none knew me, none came forth, none shouted, he is here!' The individual becomes an isolate. And the question is, 'How are the shattered strings of the harp to be restrung and their lost notes recovered?'

Is Communism the answer? No, says Mehta, 'The frightened, frustrated individual instead of being taught the discipline of responsibility, of integralness, is subjected to a collectivistic coercion. In the place of the free and human being, a new and terrible mass-man has emerged.' He outlines the features of this mass-man: 'The Mass-man is taught to believe in the sacrifice of the individual to the collective, the substitutability of one individual by another, the nonvalidity of individual morality with respect to the collective, the necessity and inflexibility of hierarchical discipline and the inevitability and the strange beauty of violence. The Mass-man functions not on the human but zoological level.' And the result? 'Every aspect of life is controlled by the *raison d'etat*. The diverse threads of life are gathered together into a political knot. Art, culture, education, science are controlled by the State. Thought wears a strait-jacket and the artist is put in uniform. The State becomes all pervasive; inside the State the ruling party wields absolute power and within the party the leadership is supreme. Vamping man's weaknesses and frailties the Leviathan reduces all men to a dead level—interchangeable parts of a machine.' Why this swing from an irresponsible individualism to an equally irresponsible collectivism? Says Mehta, 'It is the tiredness of the human spirit that breeds totalitarianism. From over-all negation, from cynical repudiation of all values, from bitter nihilism, man swings over to the polar opposite—adoration of discipline and hierarchical order.'

There is a third concept which sees man essentially as a 'responsible being'. Both Gandhism and Socialism in India today, taking their stand on this concept, are concerned to break the false alternatives of Capitalism and Communism by 'a new discipline of responsibility, of integralness'. There is a great deal of difference between Gandhism and Socialism, but both are beginning to learn from one another and each to redefine one's own ideal in the light of the other's, so that Nehru and Jayaprakash Narain who in themselves are both socialists and Gandhites at once, look forward confidently to an inevitable 'integration' of the two ideologies into one. Says Jayaprakash, 'Gandhi is the one tremendous fount in India from which socialism will continue to derive inspiration'. The features of the ideal of Responsibility thus emerging are not yet clear; but some points are worth noting.

Some Features of the Responsible Society

I

There is a deep awareness that a society to be truly responsible should be conceived as a plurality of decentralized societies and not as one centrally organized concentrated mass.

Gandhi's principle of *swadeshi* (love of neighbourhood) which to him was almost a religious creed, an eternal Natural Law of social ordering;

was an emphasis on the priority of the small neighbourhood societies in which persons could know one another by name and love and serve one another in a concrete manner. Gandhi saw the destruction of such neighbourhood societies of the villages of India through the centralized industries, and hence he set his face against the encroachment of the machine. The problem of the machine civilization which Gandhi posed, socialists recognize is a most real one, and while they would emphasize the need of industrialization for India, they would pause and warn about the peril of annihilation of the humanity of man through it, a peril which can be prevented only by planned decentralization along with the inevitable centralization which the machine brings. They see clearly that 'either we must put back the hands of economic and technological changes and regain balance through the old institutional and instinctive aids, or we have to meet life in terms of varied groups of autonomy and phases of responsibility.' Thus while rejecting Gandhi's solution through restriction of 'the tempo of change and growth' and return to 'traditional patterns of life' as 'not possible', the socialists place a great deal of emphasis on the principle of 'pluralism'. Says Mehta: 'The new discipline cannot find full expression until far-reaching social and economic changes are made. But those changes can be fruitful only to the extent the complex world is broken down, here and now, into many layers and on each layer a new understanding and integration among men and between men and things are attempted. Life's lotus is many-layered and every petal is precious. Socialism therefore conceives of a pluralistic world: political life becomes a pyramid of autonomous groups and economic life is thought of in terms of functional freedoms. Only in a republic of freedom does man discover full Freedom.'

This emphasis on building society from bottom upwards is to counteract the danger of the technical betraying the social and human, and to make technical changes in the structure of society enhance the humanity of men. The concentration on the technical changes has made the communist 'a reactionary rather than a revolutionary', says Jayaprakash. He continues, 'Socialism is not merely anti-capitalism nor statism. Nationalization of industry and collectivization of agriculture are important aspects of socialist economy; but in themselves they are not socialism'. On the contrary, socialism is the creation of 'a society based on certain human values of human and social life; values which could never be sacrificed in the name of theory or the Party line or expediences of any sort'.

II

There is clear awareness of the problem of power-politics necessary for socialist revolution. Achyut Patwardhan, a foremost leader of the I.S.P. writing to the Madras congress of the Party gave his reason for withdrawing altogether from politics to become a *yogi*. He says how for the past twenty years he had been in the thick of the fight for social justice and how experience 'led most of us to seek political power as the major instrument of social change'; and as a result 'political power became the sole immediate objective of our organized efforts'. The consequence was 'deviation of *social* philosophy into *power* philosophy', an 'outlook of seeking power at any price' and 'the growing vogue of ruthlessness in our public life'. Achyut recognizes that 'this tendency is

not more particularly at work in the Socialist Party ; it is the prevailing mode of political action all the world over'. And he concludes : 'There must be another approach to social regeneration which does not negate itself in the vicious circle of power politics'; and to discover this 'path of social redemption which can forge for itself an instrument as worthy and sane as the end it seeks to attain' Achyut becomes a *yogi*. Commenting on this, Jayaprakash says, 'We are aware of the limitations to which he has drawn attention. It is not possible for a political organization to convert itself into a spiritual organization, but as I have stated above the Socialist Party by subscribing to the principles of Democratic Socialism is endeavouring to safeguard the very human values which he wants to preserve by other means. . . . It is precisely because we are interested in preserving and creating certain values of social life, it is precisely because we are interested in building up a *socialist society*, and not merely in the establishment of a *socialist state*, that we have raised the banner of democratic socialism.'

Here again Gandhiji has posed the problem most acutely and no one in India who has some reverence for man as a person can afford to bypass him. Nehru over and over again speaks about the relevance of Gandhian doctrines of truth and non-violence to any revolutionary situation. In a message to the Lucknow Conference on Religion, Culture and Morality he said, 'We live in a rapidly changing age when it has become essential to replace our old political and economic structures. . . . Nevertheless there must be something permanent in the essential cultural and moral values which does not and should not change. If that changes then the social structure may lose its anchorage completely. Mahatma Gandhi laid constant emphasis on this vital aspect of existence. He called it truth and non-violence. . . . His basic lesson that only through right means can right ends be achieved is seldom remembered. Repeatedly even in our generation, failure and disaster have faced the world because of wrong methods and wrong means. And yet we go round the self-same path not learning from our experience.' No wonder every socialist who is not a communist is viewing with admiration and expectation the *Bhoodan Yagna* (Land-gift movement) under the leadership of Gandhian leadership ; and the Socialist Party while considering it 'slow' and 'inadequate' has officially resolved to co-operate with the same in so far as it contributes to the agrarian revolution in India.

Gandhism however does not recognize the class-struggle which socialism does. Socialism therefore goes a step further and seeks to use all non-violent methods (both organized constitutional agitation and peaceful civil-disobedience) in the class-struggle to attain its ends ; thus keeping politics the servant of the truly social revolution. Because of their awareness of the necessity and peril of power in society, the socialists unlike the Communists, take their stand on a genuine appreciation of the fundamental freedoms which liberal democratic institutions seek to safeguard even as they want to make them substantial by putting more economic and social content.

III

It is clear from what has been said above that Indian socialism does not define socialism as primarily an economic doctrine and adhere to it in any doctrinaire way. But it is eager that its emphasis on the

social should not lessen (that it does, is the criticism of Communists) the passion for the revolution in the economic structure of society which is urgently necessary to achieve the new social discipline. It is the common conviction of Nehru, Jayaprakash and Vinoba that urgent radical changes in the economic structure of society are needed to 'liberate' the peasant, to satisfy his land-hunger and reinstate an economic basis for the societies that nurture personal responsibility among the peasantry. If China has taught any lesson it is that on this issue will be decided the future of democracy *versus* totalitarianism in Asia. 'Always the Kuomintang points the moral for the rest of Asia' says Maurice Zinkin, in *Asia and the West*, and it is the same moral the socialists have learned from nearer home in Telengana and the last General Elections. India if it is not to fall a prey to Communism should have a 'solid base of a contented peasantry'; and 'the peasantry can be kept contented if it is enabled to own its own land, to earn enough to live on and to remain free from hag-riding debt'. Therefore the socialists of India have set before themselves 'a radical policy against landlord and moneylender'. There may be differences regarding the tempo of changes, the question of compensation, etc., but the aim set forth is clear and well-defined—it is nothing less than abolition of landlordism and the moneylender. 'Subject to the ultimate right of the community, land must belong to the tillers and all intermediaries should go', reads an I.S.P. resolution of 1951, and it goes on, 'Except for rehabilitation, compensation to small landlords, no compensation should be paid for the abolition of landlordism'.

The socialist policy to private *vs.* public ownership of the means of production or to national *vs.* foreign investment is not so well-defined but is pragmatic. This is for the obvious reason that India has a backward economy which needs first and foremost increased industrial production. Socialists seek to examine the question of 'nationalization' itself from the point of view of the primary need of production. There is a common conviction among socialists that 'all the available and created factors of production must be applied in accordance with a plan', under which a mixed economy will function—industries: cottage, medium and large-scale; sectors: private, public and people's; and investment: national and foreign. But the I.S.P. considers 'nationalization of basic industries' a condition for success of such an 'overall plan', which has social welfare as its aim.

Can India realize this Ideal?

India has only two alternatives before it—either this ideal of Responsible Society or Communism. But the question remains whether according to a realistic estimate of social realities in India, can this ideal of social democracy be realized. Here there are many 'ifs' and 'buts'. But to argue that Communism, whether desirable or not, is inevitable is to accept defeat before the battle is joined and to make it inevitable. And therefore let us consider some problems in the way of realizing Responsible Society in India and the tasks involved there.

First and foremost, the ideology of Socialism is weak because it lacks coherence. Socialism in India is an attempt to hold on to what is true in Liberalism, Marxism and Gandhism and to reject what is false

in them. Half-truths of idealism, materialism and moralism will not cohere except when redefined in the light of an interpretation of man, society and social history which is 'more comprehensive in its range of apprehension and more thorough in its appreciation of the interplay of factors in the real world' than any of them. Asoka Mehta, unlike many of the socialists who are thoroughgoing naturalists, conceives of 'ultimate truths of life' which are 'not historical and sociological'. He says, 'It is man's nature to live simultaneously in temporal truths and eternal verities. Socialism has mighty power because it inheres the amphibious nature of man.' But Mehta's dialectic of the temporal and the eternal is not shared by most socialists and socialism has remained mighty weak.

Secondly, the idea of responsible society lacks in India today a supporting culture. Jai Prakash speaking of the weakness of the socialist ideology says that it did not become 'a burning inspiration'; 'where arguments convinced the mind the heart remained cold. Democratic Socialism was intellectually satisfying perhaps, but it failed to evoke that emotional response which makes men die for their ideas'. And he is of the opinion that it is due to 'the preoccupation with theories and neglect of values.' Do 'values' evoke 'emotional response' unless they are embedded in a culture, in the art, liturgy and other archetypal representations which feed the imagination and mould the emotional responses? The ancient culture of India did not know the values of responsible personality; certainly its redefinition has been going on from the time of Ram Mohan Roy to Gandhi and Nehru, and on the wake of national freedom there is a renewed search for a redefined national culture which will become an effective support for the new democratic politics. But it is not yet, and the existing divorce between social democratic politics and the culture which moulds the emotions cut the nerve of socialistic idea and politics.

Thirdly, Responsible Society conceived of as an ideal is impossible. Ideals do not generate power, only faith does. Liberalism had in its heyday and Communism has now, the elements of faith in them, because they are associated with a concept of what *is*, of the nature of reality. In those who adhere to the ideal of Responsible Society, I mean the best of them like Nehru, Mehta, Jai Prakash, Vinoba Bhave and others, it is associated with certain values which have the nature of an 'ideal' or 'law', of what *ought to be* than what *is*. Even Mehta's dialectic which conceives of 'achievement of self-harmony and acceptance of the rights and reality of other men' as the absolute ethical ideal does not comprehend the question of the ultimate dimension of reality which will explain the existence of the absolute ethic and its denial among men.

What is the contribution of the Christian and the Christian Church in this situation?