

MYTH AND REALITY

# Violence, Non-Violence and Gandhi

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FORCE, VIOLENCE MAY NOT necessarily lead to capture of political power. But these along with constructive programs aimed at improving the lot of the people coupled with restrained violence plus mass support, can lead to political power. This happened in revolutionary China, Cuba and hence the truth of the Mao dictum "Political power grows out of the barrel of the gun" is conditional and its misapplication depending mainly on violence, as happened in the Naxalite uprising of the 1970s, proved to be failure and disastrous.

Political power rests mainly on the confidence, trust and consent of the vast majority of people. Adult franchise is a powerful weapon in the hands of the people as has been seen in the general Elections of 1967, 1977, 2011 in West Bengal. Nevertheless, the state keeps at its disposal enormous power of violence to keep the dissenters at bay, opponents obedient. The state besides the very potent long ideological indoctrination, media, TV, film, etc. keeps at its disposal enormous power of diverse forms of violence. The power structure of the government is intact as long as the commands are obeyed and the army or police forces are prepared to use their weapons. When this is no longer the case the situation changes abruptly. Not only the rebellion is not put down but the arms themselves change hands—sometimes as in the Hungarian revolution—within a few hours. This happened many times and can happen any time particularly in states where governments, are not that strong and its credibility is lost as in Bangladesh in 1971 and also in the last days (1946) of the British Raj in India.

Where power erodes it is replaced with violence, the extreme forms of which are military dictatorships. Even legally constituted governments evince such tendencies. In early 1970s govt. unleashed massive violence against the Naxalites and could crush them mainly because the Naxalites could not elicit sufficient mass support for which their *unwise* programs are more responsible. As people's confidence in the Left Front Govt. declined, more and more violence, both overt and covert, were unleashed as have been witnessed in Singur, Nandigram, Lalgarh. Power and violence at their extremes are mutually exclusive. Now the TMC under Mamata Banerjee has come to power even without the power of violence.

Gandhi's so-called power of non-violence could have had different fate if he had to confront enemies like Hitler of Germany or Stalin of Russia. There would have been massacres and forcible submission from which Indians could not have recovered again in a century. The British bore with Gandhi's non-violent Satyagraha movements because in some ways they found it useful for their rule since these acted as a "safety valve" for letting out people's anger. Still the British sometimes felt impatient even with that minor irritant that Gandhi was. When Gandhi launched his Quit India Movement (1942) with his campaign of peaceful resistance, Churchill raged that "he (Gandhi) ought to be lain bound hand and feet at the gates of Delhi and then trampled on by an enormous elephant with the new Viceroy seated on its back". As the resistance swelled (much of which became violent) he announced: "I hate Indians. They are a beastly people with a beastly religion. (*The Statesman*, Oct. 31, 2010)

Gandhi might not have consciously colluded with the British. But with his backward looking psyche, superstitions, religious nature and little understanding and vision about the great and inevitable importance of modern S&T for India he was not perceived as a real threat to the continuance of the British rule in India. The shrewd British were masters in politics and statecraft with which they built up and controlled the vast empire all over the world. Except his pseudo fight against casteism and flimsy opposition to British rule and the slogan of Quit India (1942), his contribution seems only marginal. If, as some historians would have Indians believe, that Gandhi's anti-British non-violent movements aroused the Indian masses against the British paving the way for the final hammer of INA and Bombay Naval Mutiny of 1946 that had forced the British to leave, then one should also recognize the valuable contributions of the tribal revolts of 19th century plus the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the Terrorist movements of the 20th century. He had little influence in the tribal areas and among the lower castes who were the majority population. Katherine Mayo, author of *Mother India* (1927) wrote (pp 133) :

*When the Prince of Wales visited India in late November 1921 then Gandhi at the height of his popularity and prestige called for a general boycott of the royal visit .But ignoring Gandhi's call for the total boycott people mostly from the lower social strata gave the prince a spectacular hearty welcome and ovation at Bombay ,Northwest India etc.*

Despite so much of mass support and enormous justification for environmental protection, the long dedicated heroic struggles of Medha Patkar and others could not save the river and Narmada Bachao Andolon could not succeed. Evident reason : they were Gandhians and Non-violent. Likewise at Dante-wada, Himangsu Kumar's 17-year-old Gandhiite Asram could be devastated by security forces rendering him homeless and his Gandhibadi mission of rural welfare demolished. Evidently Govt.'s power in the area has eroded and so they are resorting to increased violence and the process spirals down. And for this they are even using the Harmads of Salwa Judum.

Gandhi consciously perhaps did not do anything to help the British. He was honest and sincere but was misguided by erroneous thinking. Whatever that may it be his social and political activities neither helped Indian social progress, nor helped Indian Independence. Even before independence his closest friends in the Congress including Nehru, Patel, Azad marginalized him and could neither prevent India's partition nor prevent fierce communal riots and killings of lakhs of people. If Nathuram Godse did not assassinate him, he would have died broken heart observing the abject failure of all that he believed and strived for including his social and economic programs that he assiduously built up. His backward looking psyche, religious nature and little understanding of the great and inevitable importance of modern S&T for India did not help progress. Despite his total failures Gandhi is still now projected as the great father of the nation. Evidently the Congress leaders have learnt politics and statecraft.

It is claimed, written and preached every time everywhere that Freedom won on the midnight of 15th August, 1947 was the grand victory of the Congress and Gandhi's force of Non-violence. History is written by the victors which in the Orwellian language is—

*Those who control the present control the past.*

*Those who control the past control the future.*

Evidently rulers on both sides of the border have matured and learnt statecraft and history of freedom struggle has been written and re-written to suit the rulers.

But the reality is different as is revealed to the present writer even not from deep study. It was the INA's violent struggles under Subhas Bose (1945) that aroused the Indian nation. Three of the top officers of the INA General Shah Nawaz Khan (Muslim), Colonel Prem Sehgal (Hindu) and Colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon (Sikh) were put on trial at the Red Fort for alleged crimes "waging war against the king Emperor". While Nehru was busy defending the three; he (Nehru), Gandhi, Mohd Ali Zinnah and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad had come to a secret pact that if Subhas Bose was to enter India (as many knew he hadn't died in 1945), he would be handed over and charged. On the other side, Nehru appeared in Barrister's coat to defend the convicted three officers of the INA. This way he not only managed, even bettered his public image. He always received tacit British cooperation in his shrewd political games. Now his dynastic rule is established.

Unprecedentedly and mysteriously, these trials were very public. Due to the sympathy toward Netaji and the INA in general, there was an instant and large spontaneous outpouring of passion and patriotism among Indians. These stories inspired the Naval Mutiny at Bombay which started on Feb. 18, 1946 and quickly spread to Karachi, Calcutta, Cochin and Vizag. Sixty thousand sailors were involved in the naval strike that put the final nail on the coffin of British rule in India. Names of the mutineer battle ships INS Talwar, INS Khyber are little known to the present generation of Indian people. But the name of Battleship Pottemkin is much better known. Next day Feb. 19, 1946 the then British Prime Minister Harold Atlee declared that India would be given full independence. The heroism and sacrifices of the Naval mutineers and people and workers of Bombay, Calcutta, Karachi and at other places exceed those of the 1905 naval strike in Russia's Black Sea fleet immortalized in Eisenstein's classic film Battleship Potemkin. Utpal Dutt, the famous Bengalee writer and actor wrote and dramatized a play "Kallol" depicting aspects of Naval Mutiny for which he was arrested in Dec. 1965.

The British became extremely nervous in Feb. 1946 because Indian army was not obeying British Officers and the INA spirit widely spread also in the army and air force, to say nothing among the Indian public. It was no longer possible to rule India with army from Britain which was devastated by WWII and the British wanted peace. The British people would have revolted against their Government if Britain had to send English troops to maintain the colony in India which had the potential of a protracted war. So, the British took the wiser and shrewd course of granting independence which was also being pressed upon by the USA. So the British handed over the power to its lackeys the Congress in India and the Muslim League in Pakistan and ended its two century of direct colonial rule.

[See : Phani Bhushan Bhattacharya: *Nau Bidroher Itihas (in Bengali, 1979)*. Websites under Indian Naval Mutiny of 1946 (Much revealing information)]. The mainstream politicians from Jinnah to Gandhi to Nehru to Maulana Azad all let these heroic final freedom fighters down. This rebellion and its genesis was a God send to reinforce religious and class harmony, which was forged instantly without any machination. And Freedom earned that way would have been real freedom and the country would not have been partitioned sowing the seed of perennial enmity and hatred in the subcontinent.

In Calcutta's Raj Bhavan in 1956 Lord Clement Atlee was staying as state guest and Justice P B Chakrabarty, the then acting Governor asked the former British PM "what was the extent of Gandhi's influence upon the British decision to quit India". Atlee's lips widened in smile of disdain. He uttered slowly :

"m-i-n-i-m-a-l"!

Another question was asked to Atlee : if the Quit India Movement of 1942 (incidentally which was not much non-violent) had subsided and nothing major happened in the mainstream politics, why did the British had to leave so suddenly in 1947? Atlee's response was : erosion of loyalty to the British Crown among the Indian army and navy personnel as a result of the military activities of Subhash Bose.

Personal ambition, ego overtook the greater interest of the nation and its people and in various ways the Congress leaders colluded with the British and accepted a partitioned India on communal lines spoiling for ever the future of the country with a sham independence. Phani Bhushan Bhattacharya mentioned the name of Bhulabhai Desai who was a Congressman in the secret All India Coordination Committee of the Revolutionaries that included people from the Army, the Air force and the Navy.

In retrospect, Nehru appears to be the shrewdest of all the national leaders and his dynasty still rules. Gandhi was a confused personality who was marginalized in the wee hours of independence. Patel was like him, not untransperant. The national leaders from Jinnah to Nehru to Patel to Azad put their personal image, ambition and ego above the greater interest of the people and the country and conceded the partition on communal lines. Their political stand was highly anachronistic. They opted for a secular India but accepted a Pakistan based on Islamic religion. All of them spoiled the grand possibility of a real revolutionary freedom without permanently putting the subcontinent in ernbitterment and communal curse.

Subhas Bose was dreaded and hated by most of the big national leaders. Now he is little more than an icon. And the heroes of the Naval Mutineers have been quietly forgotten. It's simply intriguing that those who condemn violence, now eulogize and glorify past revolutionaries. Not even the enquiry report of 600 pages prepared by a committee in 1946 has not been made public even 65 years after the episodes. The committee consisted of the following well known personalities:

Tekchand, Konger Dulim Singh, Jayakar, Justice Jaffarullah, K Benkatarama Sastri, Justice Biswas, Sir Ahladi Krisnaswami Ayer. As yet this report has not been made public and strangely parliamentary political parties have not demanded its publication.

### THE OPPOSITE OF VIOLENCE IS NOT NON-VIOLENCE

"Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance. This implies that it is not correct to think of the opposite of violence as non-violence; to speak of non-violent power is redundant. Violence can destroy power, it is utterly incapable of creating it. Hegel and Marx's great trust in the dialectical 'power of negation', by virtue of which opposites do not destroy but smoothly develop into each other because contradictions promote and do not paralyze development, rests on a much older philosophical prejudice : that evil is no more than a private *modus* of the good, that good can come out of evil, that in short, evil is but a temporary manifestation of a still-hidden good. Such time-honored opinions have become dangerous. They are shared by many who have never heard Hegel-Marx, for the simple reason that they inspire hope and dispel fear—a treacherous hope

used to dispel legitimate fear. By this, I do not mean to equate violence with evil". (Hannah Arendt: *On Violence*)

A society divided into antagonistic classes or conflicting groups with conflicting interests is vibrant and alive notwithstanding occasional violent conflicts. The state has evolved to moderate and manipulate these conflicts and keeps going the normal necessary activities of production and services. To a chemist as the present writer is, the state can be likened to a moving machine consisting of various parts in which constant frictions are unavoidable and only natural, however well it is built with the best of materials and well oiled. The frictional losses are inevitable and some loss of energy has to be accepted. Likewise in a pluralistic democratic society some conflicts, some "waste of energy" is unavoidable. Indeed these help social progress as has been said by T S Eliot in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1948). In another chemical imagery a society divided into two broad antagonistic classes (like the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in Marxian view) is inherently unstable like a chemical high explosive like nitroglycerine or TNT whose molecules contain two antagonistic parts—viz. a reducing (fuel) glycerine or toluene part, and an oxidizing nitro group part—are combined to produce an apparently stable molecule. But slight shock or spark can cause heavy explosion with the release of highly destructive energy that is capable of completely destroying the whole molecule. The revolutionaries are supposed to supply the shock or spark by way of carrying newer ideas and information. But it is the business of the state to prevent explosion that has the potential of destroying the whole society as in a chemical high explosive. Hence politics has been defined as the art and science of governance. Democratic Pluralism ensures the state machinery not to blow up but keep going with minimum energy loss through diverse frictions.

"Neither a classless society, nor a society of strict and impenetrable social barriers is good .... We think of friction as waste of energy a classless society should always be emerging into class, and a class society should be tending towards obliteration of its class distinctions So, within limits, the friction not only between individuals but between groups, seems to me quite necessary for civilization. The universality of irritation is the best assurance of peace. A country within which the divisions have gone too far is in danger to itself: a country which is too well united—whether by nature or by device, by honest purpose or by fraud and oppression—is a menace to others. In Italy and Germany, we have seen that a unity with politico-economic aims, imposed violently and too rapidly, had unfortunate effects upon both nations .... Ideally, each village, and of course more visibly the larger towns, should have each its peculiar character". (T S Eliot, loc cit.)

Under the present circumstances the intellectuals should search for the truth, collect information, analyze them and disseminate them. The tribals were grossly betrayed in the past and reduced them to pathetic existence. Didn't ancestors of this great land Bharat treat the tribals in ways similar to those the European colonizers did in the North and South Americas, Australia and Africa?

The primitive agrarian community based on cooperation and common property in the land was a potent form of social organization, which could lead directly into higher forms of social organization without having to go through the phase of capitalistic production. In the later years of his life Marx was inclined to such thinking [Eric Fromm : *Sane Society*, Ch 7].

Indian Constitution was framed by a Constituent Assembly constituted of 389 members (296 from India with 93 from the Indian states) that worked from 1946 to 1949 and served as its first Parliament. The members were representatives from less than 10 percent of the population elected on the basis of the govt. of India Act 1935 and not on the basis of universal adult franchise. Naturally, as Subhas Kashyap writes :

“the constitution did not represent a complete break with the colonial past, 75 percent of the constitution can be said to be a reproduction of the Government of India Act, 1935 with suitable adaptations and modifications.”

The Congress in India and the Muslim League in Pakistan came into Power from the Authority inherited from the British Royalty. This authority was not derived from the people of India on the basis of universal franchise.

The constitution has become accepted. It did not evolve but imposed. But its most important part, the directive principles, should be justiciable that is, made into laws. Amartya Sen's recent book "Identity and Violence", 2006, is highly illuminating which emphasizes Democratic Pluralism. Sen has brilliantly shown that all people, all human groups have multiple identities, not one exclusive or unique like ethnicity, religion, language or culture. Such identities should be recognized and respected to. Reason, education, tolerance and freedom of expression and activities can minimize the need for much violence in resolutions of conflicts mainly between the state and the dissenters. And people can build up a better India where Democratic Pluralism will flourish. Such approach is consistent with the greatest principles of modern science, particularly the great entropy law, which applies to society also. Extreme violence must have to be avoided. Conflicts will ever remain. That is also a sign of health and conducive to progress. But these should be settled through discussions and negotiations. Politics, is the art and science of control and manipulation of social psychology .For this best brains of the land are recruited by the states with handsome emoluments and perquisites while the unorganized resourceless oppositions are naturally handicapped. Even the open organized political parties are divided. But why? □