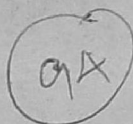


# POLITICAL ETHICS IN THE PRE-GANDHIAN ERA

Lala Lajapat Rai Memorial Lectures

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by  
Thiru N. MAHALINGAM

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**Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Lectures**  
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**POLITICAL ETHICS IN THE PRE-GANDHIAN ERA**

N. MAHALINGAM

**LECTURE—I**

Friends,

I am happy and privileged to be called upon by the University of Madras to deliver the Lala Lajpat Rai Memorial Lectures for the year 1973-74. This is for two reasons. In the first place, I have been, from my boyhood, nurtured in thoughts of independence and nationalism by the fateful happenings of the first four decades of this century. In the second place, it is this university which was responsible for my development both in the arts and the technical fields.

Lala Lajpat Rai was one of those nationalists who was responsible, in a substantial measure, for the growth of Indian Nationalism. Nothing can be a greater tribute to the great Lala than those which came from the pen of Mahatma Gandhi. His words have become prophetic and are quoted often by those who revere the great Lajpat Rai. According to Gandhiji "Men like the Lala cannot die so long as the sun shines in the Indian sky. Lajpat Rai means an institution. From his youth, he made service to the country, his religion. His patriotism was no narrow creed. He loved his country because he loved the world. His nationalism was inter-nationalism." These words give us an insight into the contribution which Lajpat Rai made for the growth of nationalism in India. His was not a solitary voice. Along with him there were many others who were equally responsible for paying the way for the evolution of national movement in this Country. The contribution of Lajpat Rai was solid and substantial not because he was a broad nationalist; not because he was a social

reformer, not because he was an educationist, but because he practised the doctrines which he preached. In this regard, he by his own example, anticipated Gandhiji. It is only appropriate that the Madras University should honour this great son of India through the 'Lala Lajpat Rai Centenary Lectures.' This year, the mantle has fallen on my shoulders to deliver these lectures. I have opted to give three talks in this series. The first will deal with political ethics in the pre-Gandhian era; the second will analyse social ethics in the pre-Gandhian era, and the final talk will be on the Swadeshi Cult in the pre-Gandhian era.

In the lecture of this evening I propose to deal with the political ethics in the pre-Gandhian era. I have deliberately chosen to use the term 'political ethics' for the reason that ethics can never be static. Ethics is an environment of society and as society changes, its ethics also changes. That does not mean that what was moral today will become immoral tomorrow or what was immoral yesterday, will become moral today. Political ethics, as I would like to define, refers to the process of the evolution of political thinking in a country over a period of time. They are norms which arise from the circumstances of time and they grow with the society. May be that in this process of evolution there may be certain unhealthy trends and these are perhaps the by-products of any process of evolution.

When I talk to you of political ethics in the pre-Gandhian era, I have a responsibility to define what I mean by pre-Gandhian era. Pre-Gandhian era may mean the period before Mahatma Gandhi. But such a definition is very vague for pre-Gandhian era, as defined just now, may mean from the days of the coming of the Aryans to the days of Mahatma Gandhi. If that is the case, we have to discuss about the contributions of Asoka Vardhana, Harsha Vardhana, the various Anglo-Indian administrators particularly men of the calibre of Lord William Bentinck and Lord Ripon. So, for the purpose of convenience, we shall limit the pre-Gandhian period to the whole of the 19th century, between 1800 and 1900.

In the pre-Gandhian period, the seeds for the Gandhian ideas and ideals were sown; in the Gandhian period they took shape and gained popularity. To-day, Gandhism like Buddhism, is more popular abroad than "at home". However, this factor does not, in any

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way, rule out the possibility of revival of the popularity of Gandhism in India. When people, the world over, accept it, we too may have to revive it with greater vigour. Political and economic conditions in the different parts of the world will force Gandhism on them as it will be the only way out for today's political, economic and social problems.

It may be asked why we should think of political ethics in the pre-Gandhian period. There are several reasons for this. First and foremost, it was Gandhiji who provoked political awakening among the people of India and to enable him to do so, an environment was created by eminent nationalists and socio-religious reformers in the pre-Gandhian era. Second, Gandhiji was the Father of the Nation, and he, during his life time, by his speeches, writings and action, justified this reverence given to him by the people. Third, Gandhiji established the truth that politics should be the first refuge for the honest man and not, as often said, "a last refuge for the scoundrel."

According to Gandhiji, a good Government is one which is based on the twin virtues of Truth and Non-violence. It is important for a ruler to follow the path of righteousness and this is possible only by adopting truthfulness, non-violence and trusteeship attitudes. To him, religion is truth and truth is religion. All these ideas of Gandhian ethics were nothing but a crystallisation of the ideas and thoughts developed by the national and religious leaders as well as social reformers of the 19th century.

Political ethics comprise of liberty, equality and fraternity. These have two bases in India; the first refers to the social base and the second refers to the national base. However, the social and national bases for political ethics in India, were provided by such factors as socio-religious movements, impacts of British Imperialism; western education; and growth of journalism.

Of these, the socio-religious movements take an important place as they have been responsible for providing a national awakening among the people and this formed the first phase of political ethics in the pre-Gandhian period. Among the socio-religious reformers, the name of Raja Ram Mohan Roy occupies a significant place. He is often remembered as the "Father of Modern India" or "Father of



Indian Renaissance." He founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828, which opposed idol worship as recommended by the Puranic Hinduism and advocated the worship of the one Supreme Being. As Ramsay MacDonald pointed out "the Brahmo Samaj was unwilling to desert Hinduism," but was willing to "become liberal and respond to the impact of Western faiths." Indeed, it was a religion of the Upanishads with modifications. Besides, Ram Mohan Roy was a universalist who believed in the universal brotherhood of man. This was evidenced by his letter to the foreign Minister of France, in 1831, in which, he wrote: "It is now generally admitted that not religion only, but unbiassed commonsense as well as the accurate deductions of scientific research lead to the conclusion that all mankind are one great family of which the numerous nations and tribes existing are only branches. Hence, enlightened men, in all countries, feel a wish to encourage and facilitate human intercourse in every manner by removing as far as possible, all impediment to it in order to promote the reciprocal advantage and enjoyment of the whole human race."

Ram Mohan influenced contemporary thinking on social life, religion and education. On social life, abolition of *Sati* is important; on the religious side, he stood for monotheism and universalism; and on the educational side, he supported the promotion of the Western type of education. His ideas formed the first step towards the abolition of caste system and paved the way for national awakening. The political ethics that may be derived from his contributions are the ideas of social equality, religious unity, and universalism. All these lead us in the direction of the evolution of democratic ethics in the Country.

More or less similar lines of thinking could be seen in the teachings of Saint Ramalinga Vallalar of the early 19th century who stressed on three concepts, namely, 1. Ahimsa and vegetarianism, 2. Casteless society, 3. Universalism. The concept of monotheism, developed earlier, found its full expression in the teachings of Vallalar. He stressed on the institutional approach to social problems. He emphasised on the *Salai* for the body; *Sangham* for the intellect, *Sabhai* for the spirit and *Siddhivilakam* for divinity. Further, he recommended, not only national integration, but also international integration. The symbolism of the light for the universality of God, advocated by

Vallalar, suggests international integration. In fact, Light was accepted as a symbol for God at a meeting of the delegates of UNO. The idea that "all man-kind is one" and that religion has a role to play in them of integrating peoples was brought out. The whole approach is based on the concept of equality which is the keystone of the democratic arch.

Swami Vivekananda made an equally solid contribution to national awakening in this country and helped the development of democratic ideas. Rabindranath Tagore said "If you want to understand India, read Vivekananda's works." Mahatma Gandhi himself affirmed in public; "The study of the Swami's books has been a great help to me and they have increased my love and understanding of India. The Swamiji was one of the leading torch bearers who re-awakened India and inspired self-confidence in the nation and respect and faith in the past achievements of the Hindu race and removed the inferiority complex that they had bred in themselves after the advent of the British." No wonder, Jawaharlal Nehru rightly asserted in 1949; "The first Indian national movement, the Swadeshi movement, desired to found its work on Vivekananda's spiritual basis and one of its leaders, Aurobindo, vindicated his ideas." Auroville, the international city, which we find at Pondicherry, today, is a realization of these dreams of the Swamiji, Aurobindo and even Pandit Nehru.

When the Swamiji spoke out, at the Congress of Religions at Chicago that "religion is not the crying need of India; the desperate need is for bread," he was having economic upliftment in his mind. He declared that "it is an insult to offer religion to a starving people." The Swamiji too, preached universalism when he said "Each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth." This, again, is a suggestion in the direction of national integration and universalism.

Among the social factors, which roused feelings of liberty, equality and fraternity, constituting the three jewels in the crown of political ethics, the role of the Theosophical movement is significant. The Theosophical society was founded by Madame H.P. Blavatsky and Col. Olcott in 1875, in U.S.A., a year after Saint Vallalar in India



attained beatitude. Both the founders of the movement visited India and set up the headquarters of the society at Madras with the aim of collecting and diffusing the laws that govern the universe. Mrs. Annie Besant, an Irish lady of vision and wisdom, joined the society and came to India in search of eternal truths that are found in Hinduism.

Theosophy stood for universal brotherhood. Its motto "there is no religion higher than Truth", echoed the teachings of Vallalar. The Theosophists made a study of comparative religion, philosophy and science. They investigated the eternal laws that hold the universe and worked for the upliftment of the down-trodden. Dr. Besant founded the Central Hindu College, at Benares, and later, Pandit Malaviya developed it into a Hindu University. Mrs. Besant joined the Indian National Congress and influenced the nations' thinking. This too served as a powerful factor in the shaping of political ethics.

All these socio-religious reformers provided the base for the evolution of such ideas as liberty, equality and fraternity. What is more, they anticipated the thoughts of Gandhiji which asserted, there is no politics devoid of religion. Politics bereft of religion is a death trap because it kills the soul. What was the kind of religion they had in mind? They had in mind a religion which assumed social equality; a religion which presupposed economic liberation; and a religion which was universal. In other words, what Gandhiji recommended was a democratic society based on the ideals of simplicity, truthfulness, equality and love of God.

### *THE EFFECTS OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM*

The impact of British imperialism was a feeling of discontent among the people of this country and it indirectly kindled national unity and awakening. This was mostly because of their oppressive rule. The British had scant respect for Indian lives; they considered that the life of one European was worth those of many Indians. Moreover, they ridiculed the Indians and their ways of life. During their time the people were subjected to humiliations and atrocities and as pointed out by Sir Theodore Morrison, a member of the Indian Civil Service, "It is an ugly fact, which it is no use to



disguise, that the murder of the natives by English men is no infrequent occurrence." John Bright, in a speech at Birmingham said; "the history of Great Britain in India, prior to 1862, was a hundred years of crime against the docile natives of our Indian empire."

What is more, the economic exploitation of India by the British roused the national feelings of Indians. The Indian Industries were discouraged and India was looked upon merely as a market for British goods. Sir Johnson Hicks observed that the British did not conquer India for the benefit of Indians; they conquered India as an outlet for the goods of Great Britain and considered it as the finest outlet for British goods in general and for Lancashire cotton goods in particular." Though the free-trade policy of the British was a boon to their industrialists, it was a curse to the Indian manufacturers.

Yet, the British Imperialism had its beneficial effects in the shape of political unification of India. After many centuries of struggle for unity, the whole country was governed from one Centre, and this had a tremendous effect on the minds of the people who began to think of "one country and one culture" which is an essential condition of nationhood.

### *WESTERN EDUCATION*

Another important factor which influenced national thinking and the way of life in a significant measure was the introduction of Western system of education. The system of Western Education, through the English medium of education, helped the Indians of different provinces to come together and exchange their views. Besides, English served as a common language for the whole country which is an imperative need for the spread of nationalist ideas. The research work done by the Royal Asiatic Society was of immense value as scholars like Max Muller, Monier Williams, Rajendralal Mitra and Bhandarkar brought to light the glorious past of our ancient land.

Further, the educated Indians learnt the liberal and democratic ideas enunciated by J.S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, Burke and Rousseau. As Ramsay MacDonald has remarked: "Mr. Herbert Spencer's individualism and Lord Morley's liberalism are, as it were, the only battery of guns which India has captured from us and condescends to

use against us." This factor moulded the democratic mind of the educated middle class in India.

What is more, the Indian youth who went to western countries, for higher education, came into close touch with western political thinking. The French revolution gave the ideas of Popular sovereignty and national self-determination to the world. The liberation movements in Italy under Joseph Mazzini and Count Cavour, unification of Germany under Bismarck, and the American War of Independence, served as sources of inspiration for the Indian Youth and provided them with ideas like "liberty, fraternity and equality." Most of them on their return to India began starting revolutionary cells in different parts of the country.

### *GROWTH OF NEWSPAPERS AND PERIODICALS AND THE FORMATION OF THE CONGRESS*

As a consequence of the spread of Western education, increase in literacy and general consciousness, there was a feverish growth of national news papers and periodicals. Publication of a large number of national news papers helped the spread of nationalist ideas in the Country. Surendranath Banerji edited the *Bengali*, Dadabhai Naoroji founded the *Voice of India* at Bombay and Lokamanya Tilak edited an English weekly, the *Maratha*. Along with these the *Amrit Bazar Patrika* of Calcutta, the *Tribune* of Lahore and the *Hindu* and the *Swadesha Mitran* of Madras, moulded public opinion and the spirit of nationalism was spread. Bankim Chandra Chatterji produced 'Ananda Math' a novel, which became the Bible of Indian patriots. The writings of Lokamanya Tilak and Lala Lajapat Rai, enthused the youth for developing a spirit of self-sacrifice.

All these events culminated in the establishment of the Indian National Congress which held its first session at Bombay in 1885 with Sir Romesh Chandra Bonnerji as its President and Mr. Allan Octavian Hume as its Secretary. During the first twenty years after its inception, the Congress was led by the moderates, the leading lights of which were A.O. Hume, Dadabhai Naoroji, Gopalakrishna Gokhale and Surendranath Banerji. The moderates had faith in the goodness and sincerity of the British Government as they thought that the British rule was a divine gift for India. They believed in the slow



process of constitutional reform which would provide political education for the Indians. They had immense faith in the British sense of justice and fair play and hence followed the principle of "Pray, Petition and Protest." They used to pass resolutions praying the government to redress the grievances of the people; they used to submit petitions to that effect; and if the Government was indifferent to their prayers they used to offer some mild protest against it.

The Congress, during this period passed resolutions demanding such measures as : (a) abolition of the Indian Council, (b) holding the Indian Civil Service examinations simultaneously in India and England (c) reduction of the military budget (d) reform and expansion of legislative councils set up in 1861, (e) establishment of technical and industrial schools, (f) separation of the judiciary from the executive, (g) reduction of the salt duty, (h) safeguarding the interests of Indians living abroad, (i) removal of restrictions on the press, (j) imposition of protective tariff for the promotion of the native industries and (k) opening of agricultural banks and village co-operative credit societies.

The partition of Bengal in 1904 by Lord Curzon, roused the feelings of the Indians and they lost faith in the good intentions of the British. They looked upon the partition as a humiliation of the nationalists. The extremists, under B.G. Tilak, became very popular. Swadeshi, National Education and Boycott of foreign goods were put forward as the three measures for the attainment of Swaraj. Tilak gave a new slogan to the Indians that "Swaraj is my birth right and I will have it." Surendra Nath Banerji led an agitation against the partition of Bengal.

All these led to an open rift in the Congress at its Surat session held in 1907. The extremists left the Congress and they remained outside its fold till 1916. In order to satisfy the moderates, the Government introduced the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 by which a non-official majority was provided in the state legislatures.

The Government took many coercive steps against the extremist leaders. While Lala Lajapat Roy and Sardar Ajit Singh of the Punjab were deported to Mandalay Jail without trial, Loka Manya Tilak was sentenced to 6 years' imprisonment in 1908, for his provoca-



tive writings in the *Kesari*. Subramania Bharathi, Subramania Siva, and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai were the leaders of the extremist movement in the South.

But the revolutionaries and terrorists went underground and started violent activities in Punjab, Bengal and Maharashtra. Revolutionary centres were organised by Barindra Kumar Ghosh, younger brother of Aravindo Ghosh, Bhupendranath Dutta, brother of Vivekananda, Narendranath Bhattacharya and Aswanikumar Dutta. They published journals like the *Yugatar* and the *Sandhya*. Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Shyamji Krishna Verma were prominent revolutionaries of Maharashtra. Some terrorists of the Punjab threw a bomb on Lord Hardinge in 1912. Lala Haradaya, of the Punjab, went to the United States and organised the Gaddar Party to bring out an armed revolt in India.

There was unrest in the country following the introduction of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms. To put down the violent activities of the extremists, the Rowlatt Act was passed by which the Government was empowered to lock up any one without trial. Dr. Satyapal and Dr. Kitchelew of the Punjab were taken into custody. People held a huge public meeting at Amritsar in the Jalianwalla Bagh to protest against the arrests. General Dyer surrounded the place with troops and shot dead 379 persons in a few minutes. These unprovoked murders roused the passions of the people all over the country.

These factors again brought to the fore the doctrine of liberty, fraternity and equality which form the crux of democratic ethics. While socio-religious leaders influenced thinking on a casteless society leading to equality and fraternity, the political agitators, preached liberty, national integration and unity. These constitute the essence of the ethics of democracy. Again, while the moderates propagated constitutional democracy, the extremists preached Swadeshi and Swaraj to be achieved, if necessary, by violent means. These ideas reached their fructification in Gandhiji's thoughts with the difference that he added non-violence and satyagraha to them as weapons of achieving Swaraj. What remained as mere ideas took a clear shape under the leadership of Gandhiji. Let us now turn to the Gandhian political philosophy and examine how the earlier ideas attained a fructification in his thoughts.

## *GANDHIAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY*

Gandhian concept of Ram Rajya essentially means a people's Government based on virtues of truth and non-violence. Indeed these ideas were already there in the pre-Gandhian period ; but they were given a political shape and pattern by Gandhiji. Ram Rajya can be religiously translated as the Kingdom of God on earth. Politically translated, it is perfect democracy, in which inequalities based on possession and non-possession, colour, race or creed or sex have no place. In it, land and State belong to the people, justice is prompt, uniform and inexpensive and, therefore, there is freedom of worship, and of speech and the Press — all this because of the reign of the self-imposed law of moral restraint. Such a State must be based on Truth and Non-violence and must consist of prosperous, happy and self-contained villages and non-exploiting rural communities.

Gandhiji said that " by Swaraj I mean the Government by the consent of the people as ascertained by the vote of the largest number of the adult population, male and female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the service of the State and who have taken the trouble of having their names registered as voters ".

Character, according to Gandhiji, constitutes the best quality in a candidate which he commended to the electorate for consideration. He stated : ' I suggest also that voters should not identify themselves with any party or its quarrels. They should consider the candidate's views and not their party. Their character should weigh more even than their views. A man of character will make himself worthy of any position he is given. Even his mistakes will not matter much. I consider it impossible for a man without character to do higher national service so that if I were a voter from among the list, I would first select men of character and then I would understand their views. "

A legislator in a true democracy has to conform his conduct to Truth and Non-violence. Gandhiji wrote thus : " In my opinion members of Assemblies, whether as mere members or Ministers or Speakers, have in every act of theirs to bear in mind the fact that they have to conform to Truth and Non-violence. Thus the conduct of a member of the Assembly would have to be that of strictest honesty and



courtesy in dealing with his opponents. He will not resort to shabby politics, will not hit below the belt, will never take a mean advantage of his adversary. The greater his position in the Assembly, the greater his responsibility in these matters. A member in the Assembly no doubt represents his constituency and his party, but also represents the whole of his province. A Minister no doubt advances his own party but never at the expense of the nation as a whole."

"If fighting for the legislatures meant a sacrifice of truth and non-violence, democracy would not be worth a moment's thought. The voice of the people is the voice of God, and it is the voice of millions that we have to represent. Is it not possible to do so with truth and non-violence?"

To keep aloft the standard of Truth and Non-violence in a true democracy, the real power, according to Gandhiji should vest in the people and not in legislators or Ministers. He wrote thus:—"The real *Swaraj* will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abused. In other words, *Swaraj* is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."

### PEOPLE AS REAL POWER IN A STATE

"Under a Free Government, the real power will be held by the people.....The mightiest Government will be rendered absolutely impotent if the people realising their power use it in a disciplined manner and for the common good.....It must be remembered that only an infinitesimal proportion of the people can hold positions of responsibility and power in a country's government. Experience all the world over shows that the real power and wealth are possessed by people outside the group that holds the reins of Government."

It is an illusion to think that M. L. As are the guides of voters. Voters do not send representatives to the Assemblies in order to be guided by them. On the contrary, they are sent there loyally to carry out the people's wishes. The people are, therefore, the guides, not the M. L. As. The latter are servants, the former masters.

### VILLAGE REPUBLICS

True democracy of the Gandhian concept not only advocated control of the people over the legislature and the executive, but also



stood for decentralization of power, conceding self-government to the people in their units at the bottom.

He explained his scheme of village Republic-Panchayats thus : "My idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many others in which dependence is necessary. Thus, every village's first concern will be to grow its own food crops and cotton for its cloth. It should have a reserve for its cattle, recreation and playground for adults and children. Then, if there is more land available, it will grow useful money crops, excluding Ganja, tobacco, opium and the like.

"The village will maintain a village theatre, school and public hall. It will have its own waterworks ensuring clean water supply. This can be done through controlled wells or tanks. Education will be compulsory up to the final Basic Course. As far as possible, every activity will be conducted on a co-operative basis. The Government of the village, according to Gandhiji, will be conducted by a Panchayat of five persons, annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishments in the accepted sense, this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office."

Any village can become such a republic today without much interference, even from the Government whose sole effectual connection with the village is the exaction of the village revenue. Gandhiji's purpose is to present an outline of village government. Here is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own Government. The law of non-violence rules him and his Government. He and his village are able to defy the might of the world. For, the law governing every villager is that he will suffer death in the defence of his and his village's honour.

In short, Gandhian political ethics envisaged the following :

1. The sphere of the State Governance shall be as limited as feasible, on the guiding principle that 'that Government is the best, which governs the least.'

2. Supreme Power, in principle and practice, shall vest in the people, and the legislative and the executive wings shall function under their over-ruling authority.
3. There shall be no centralization of power, and the same shall be decentralised. Each village or unit shall be constituted as a republic interdependent on other villages and controlled in respect of matters relating to more than one village and independent in village matters pertaining to that village.
4. The legislator shall be elected by adult citizens who perform manual work wholly or partly in implementation of the principle of bread labour, which is an essential ingredient of non-violent socialism.
5. At the election, voters should not identify themselves with any party or its quarrels. They should consider the candidate's character and views and not their party.
6. Guideline for the legislators shall be to uphold the principles of Truth and non-violence to implement the tenets of true democracy, non-violent socialism and SARVODAYA social order, and live up to the standards of patriotism, honesty, and selfless service. The party interest, the party bosses, the party whip, the personal interest, the seat, and the vote shall be subordinated to the said principles, duties and standards. Guiding principle in legislative and executive action shall be "greatest good of all," and not "greatest good of the majority." The minority view shall be given due regard in all decisions.
7. Government shall rule on the basis of moral authority and not on the backing of force represented by army, police and penal laws.
8. Dignitaries of the government shall live a life in accordance with the principle of economic equality which is an essential ingredient of non-violent socialism and shall set up a precept for the people to follow.



If these features had been implemented the type of Government in India would have been different. We accepted a parliamentary form of Government with a strong centre exhibiting unitary features. So much so, the Country could not advance on proper lines, politically or economically. What we need is a decentralized set up on the lines suggested by Gandhiji. Even now it is not too late. The Gandhian ideals of decentralization can be implemented by adopting a three tier system of (a) (i) village Panchayat ; (ii) Panchayat Union Council ; (iii) District Development Council ; (b) State Government with more powers; (c) a Central Government with defined powers. In the new system, the Panchayat Union Council will have to become co-terminus with the Assembly and the District Development Council will have to become co-terminus with the Parliamentary Constituency. If this is done, the scope for a good government as envisaged by Gandhiji is a possibility. That Government will enable the people to have the full benefit of the realization of liberty, fraternity and equality which constitute the basic tenets of politics.

The evolution of the Gandhian political philosophy has thus a long heritage besides continuity. As it happens in the formative stages of political development in countries under colonial and imperialist rule, caution gives place to a courageous approach to outstanding issues. In India, however, there is an uniqueness about the shaping and the effectiveness of Gandhian techniques and ethical standards in that more than anything else, immediate achievements were considered more important for moulding national character. Gandhiji was also keen that there should be no break with the past and indeed drew inspiration from the ancient systems and ideals. His greatest contribution, if I may humbly make a suggestion, was his success in infusing his ethical standards and ideas in his glorious band of disciples who were highly competent to guide the destinies of the nation and establish the supremacy of moral influence in political thinking and action. In the social sphere, equally revolutionary and, perhaps, even more far reaching changes were initiated and I shall endeavour to examine how social ethics came to be evolved in the pre-Gandhian and Gandhian era in my next lecture.

## LECTURE II

### LALA LAJAPAT RAI MEMORIAL LECTURE

Gandhiji did not believe in the caste system. On the other hand, he opposed the very idea of it; to him all are the children of God. He aimed at a casteless society. Next, he preached the doctrines of *ahimsa* and religious toleration. Besides, he stood for the emancipation of women. All these aspects of social ethics were nothing but the fructification of the social thoughts developed in the pre-Gandhian period. In the process of their evolution, several movements were inaugurated and the most important of these were the Ramakrishna Mission, the Brahmo Samaj, the Theosophical Movement, the Arya Samaj and the Suddha Sanmarga Sangam. These were essentially socio-religious movements brought about by religious and social reformers. Among them, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Rajaram Mohunroy, Dayananda Saraswati and Arutprakasa Vallalar occupy a significant place.

Ram Mohun Roy's name is associated with the Governor-generalship of Lord William Bentinck for two important events; the one relates to the abolition of the Social evil, called the *sati* and the other refers to the introduction of Western education in India. *Sati* refers to the social custom of the Hindu widow immolating herself on the funeral pyre of her husband. We cannot find fault with a woman who gives up her life voluntarily out of the great love she had for the deceased husband; but external or social compulsion is something which is inhuman. Rammohun Roy considered this practice as inhuman and grossly superstitious and took a solemn vow that he would not rest until he released the Hindu womanhood from this forced martyrdom. Through writings and speeches, he was able to rouse public opinion against this monstrous custom. After several years of persistent propaganda, he succeeded in his objective and at last, in 1829, the *sati* was abolished and with it a bad stain on Hinduism was removed. According to Rev. J. Fox, a noted British missionary,



“ There is no doubt that it was greatly through his firmness, his enlightened reasoning, and his persevering efforts that the Government of Bengal, at last, thought themselves enabled to interdict the immolation of widows. His arguments and his appeals to ancient authorities held sacred by the Brahmins, enlightened the minds of many of them and made the merciful intervention of Lord William Bentinck and his Council which was no longer regarded by them and by persons connected with the East India Company at home, as an interference with the religion of the Hindus. ”

Rammohun Roy was a realist who strove hard to rid the society of superstitions so that the people can have an objective approach to their problems. He thought that the adoption of Western Education will serve as a means to realize this end. During his time, there prevailed two schools of thought : the Anglicists who despised all oriental learning, and the Orientalists who held the view that there was nothing to learn from the West. But Rammohun Roy, our social reformer, effected a compromise between these extreme views. According to him : “ In a country where false spiritualism had made men only talk big and do little, what was wanted was a wholesome antidote of western learning, a study of the natural sciences and a course in taking a practical view of life. ” Less of other-worldliness and more of healthy materialism - that is what he expected Indians to learn from western education. He stood for a practical Vedanta. Also, he was convinced that even the Vedanta philosophy would help his countrymen to come out of the slough of superstition and backwardness. His efforts culminated in the famous education decree of 1835 which inaugurated the system of English education. This enabled the Indian youth to taste the fruits of English literature and history and paved the way for the evolution of Indian nationalism and ideas of democracy, representative government, rule of law and civil liberties including freedom of the press. On the social side, this too acted as a wedge on the institution of caste.

#### *Arya Samaj :*

The Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, in 1875, set its face against idolatry. It fought as much against the evils in orthodox Hinduism as against Christianity and Islam. The Arya Samaj insisted not only on the infallibility of the VEDAS, but also

on *Karma* and rebirth, the sanctity of the cow, the importance of the *Homa* and the need of the *Samskaras*. It condemned idolatory, animal sacrifices, caste system, untouchability and child marriages, as these had no Vedic sanction. Swamy Dayananda observed that the Veda was the fountain-head, not only of all the religions of the world, but also of all the modern sciences.

The Arya Samajists established educational institutions in Punjab and Delhi. They took up the three-fold movement of *Suddhi*, *Sanghatan* and National Education. Many patriots of the country were workers of the Samaj. Lala Lajpat Rai, Bhai Paramananda and Lala Hansraj were its active leaders. Their contribution to the growth of this organization was immense and many-sided and this had a profound effect on the social ethics of India.

#### *Prathana Samaj :*

Another institution which had a profound influence on the social life of the people was the Prathana Samaj, founded by Atmaram Pandurang in 1867. Among others, Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade and R. C. Bhandarkar were its prominent leaders. They stood for rational worship and social reform and regarded themselves as a component part of Hindu family. For them religion was inseparable from social reform. So they realized the need for uplifting the depressed classes and women. The Deccan Education Society and the Widow Marriage Association are the two great institutions based on the ideals of the Prathana Samaj.

#### *Ramakrishna Mission :*

Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the greatest Hindu saint of the 19th Century, practised Yoga and realised the ultimate truth through several experiences. He was a yogi of the highest order who explained the most intricate points of the Vedanta through parables and similes. As Swami Vivekananda observed, "Ramakrishna was the embodiment of all the past religious thought in India."

Sri Ramakrishna did not found any institution or conduct any movement. On the other hand, he gathered round him ardent, diligent and devoted disciples like Narendra (later Vivekananda) who spread the message of service to humanity. Through self-directed



*sadhana*, Ramakrishna realized the universal aspect of all religions and their fundamental unity. He proclaimed the unity of all religions and the indispensability of service to humanity. His ideas, and later, his disciple's preachings, aroused a national awakening.

Swami Vivekananda took the message of Ramakrishna to the nooks and corners of India. His participation in the World Congress of Religions at Chicago in 1893 was an event of unique importance as it opened the eyes of the Hindus themselves who began to develop interest in the study of their own religion and culture. The Swami, soon after his return from his foreign tour, founded the Ramakrishna Mission. Its aim is to serve the people who are the visible manifestations of God. The message of Vivekananda served as a perennial source of inspiration and guidance to the national workers of the Country.

The Swami wanted to create men of character through his Mission. On one occasion he said: "No nation is great or good because parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good. Men are more valuable than all the wealth of the world. Suppose the Government gives you all you need. Where are the men who are able to keep up the things demanded? So make men first." He was right; he did "make men and they were the ascetics of the order founded by him."

#### *Theosophy :*

The Theosophical Society founded by Madame Blavatsky and Col. Olcott in 1875 played no small part in revolutionising the social ideas and attitudes. Its aim was to collect and diffuse the laws that govern the universe. Dr. Annie Besant, an important leader of the movement, translated the Bhagavat Gita into English and propagated the concept of universal brotherhood. This movement went a long way to revive Hinduism as Dr. Besant exhorted the Hindus to uphold the ancient culture of India and rejuvenate Hinduism. She warned the Hindus thus: "Make no mistake. Without Hinduism, India has no future,"

*"One God, One caste, One creed for man"*

Sree Narayana Guru of Kerala was a great social reformer of the Pre-Gandhian era who repudiated the institution of caste. He con-

demned untouchability and unapproachability. According to him the only method to remove caste distinction was to promote social intercourse between the members of different castes. He held the view that if the untouchables and unapproachables learn Sanskrit and medicine, the social inhibition on them would vanish quickly. As a result, many Ezavas and Theeyas of Kerala took to Sanskrit and Ayurveda. This gave them access to the kitchen as well as to the drawing rooms of the so called "high born." The stress of Sri Narayana Gurus' teaching was on "one God, one caste and one religion for man." He too emphasised and preached universality of religion and casteless society. His teachings, like those of others, had a profound influence on the social life of the people of Kerala.

What Narayana Guru was to Kerala, so was Ramaswamy Periyar to Tamil Nadu. He carried on a crusade against the evils of the caste system. His successful participation in Vaikom Satyagraha to ensure to the so-called untouchables the right to walk through public roads marks an event of importance in the social history of India. It was the precursor of the temple entry movement. What is really interesting in the event perhaps is the fact that "EVR" was applauded by Mahatmaji who went on his own to meet Periyar at the latter's place to confer with him on the subject of social reform. Periyar Ramaswamy waged a life long crusade against caste and untouchability in all its forms. He was the stout champion of womens' emancipation from and equality with man. In this crusade for liberty, fraternity and equality among all human beings, he spared none, however great and nothing however time honoured. He was up against all forms of superstition. As Aringnar Anna put it, "Periyar Ramaswamy represented and symbolised the fury and frustration in a sizable section of society at the present state of affairs."

### *Vallalar*

Saint Ramalinga was born in the twenties of the nineteenth century when India was under the rule of the British and when the society was afflicted by that hydra-headed monster of centuries old caste system. Simply on account of a supposed 'low birth', millions of Hindus were denied the basic amenities of life and cultural progress. Educational Institutions, public places and temples closed their doors against them. The untouchables, as they were called, were often ill-



treated by the Hindus of higher castes. There was no unity even among the people of higher castes. They were united only in trodding on 'the untouchables'; but in other respects, they were disunited. In fact, there were many sub-divisions even within the higher castes. Thus, the entire Hindu society was governed by the numerous caste distinctions which caused an appalling disintegration of society which got divided into water-tight compartments.

Nothing was done by the religious authorities heading the various Mutts (monasteries) in Tamil Nadu to check the large scale conversions to Christianity or to give adequate protection to the low caste Hindus and to uplift their social status. The fact that caste system has developed to the detriment of true religion and spiritual progress was not at all realized. Rituals, but not the spirit of the people, was given importance. The common man, the worker, the labourer and the tiller and so on was not made to realize the importance of religion and the higher values of life for his own progress. In other words, religion was not taken by its leaders to the common man.

Saint Ramalinga, who abhorred the very concept of caste, has recorded the tendencies and the outlook of the contemporary society. He recorded in many poems that caste system is deep rooted in society and felt strongly the need for the removal of the artificial distinctions which had proved harmful to the promotion of amity and peace.

In short the fourfold tasks before Saint Ramalinga were :

1. In order to ensure peace among members of different religions faiths as well as to strengthen the unity of the nation, the universality of various religions is to be stressed.
2. Lost confidence in spirituality is to be restored and its potency to be utilized as a life-giving and life-sustaining power.
3. Status of women has to be enhanced by giving them equal opportunities to develop themselves to be men's equal partners in life.
4. The harmful caste distinctions are to be removed.

Ramalinga deemed it an important service to remove the age-long obsession of the caste system which kept apart the people, labelling

them high and low. He attacked the caste system more vehemently than any other spiritualist of the previous age. His attack was directed against the four main castes, namely Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaisya and Sudra. He derided these divisions along with the various modes of life connected with each of them. He refused to accept the theory of high and low castes. He said that the Lord revealed to him that there is nothing like high caste; that high caste is not distinguished by the colour of the skin and that all the distinctions of caste and modes of life are meaningless. He wanted all people to be treated equally. He declared that higher spiritual knowledge and attainments will be possible only for those who make up their mind earnestly to rejoice in giving equal treatment to all, high or low. He expressed the wish that the existing social set up with its manifold strata should be changed and a new one without caste differences should be formed. To effect this change-over, he did not suggest any violent method, but advocated a non-violent revolution. He had understood full well the fact that if social reform was to be permanent and beneficial to the society, it ought to be based on religious reform. So, he took up religious reform as his main stay, and gave the world the universal religion, the philosophy of which never accepts any distinctions whatever. According to him the grounds on which the universal religion refutes caste system are :

1. All distinctions of caste are meaningless at the spiritual level.
2. All physical bodies are created by one God; hence it is against His will to discriminate between high and low on the basis of birth.

The manner in which the saint attacked the society which made much of castes is worth mentioning. He felt sorry for the people who talked tall of their respective castes and religions. He categorically stated that they were wasting their precious time in maintaining and safeguarding the interests of their castes and that they would lose much by such an exclusive approach to society. However, Vallalar treated even the caste-minded with compassion. He never wounded anybody with harsh words. At the same time, he was very firm in expressing his conviction that the theory of castes was a farce. He declared that there could be nothing like 'high caste' or 'low caste', as both are



mortal. Only those who attain the good body that knows no waning, old age, or death can be said to belong to 'high caste'. He appealed to the people to discard their castes in favour of *Sanmargam*.

He attacked caste system as it violated the principle of the integration of all souls through love. He wished that congenial relationship should exist between groups of people. The castes and the quarrels for reasons concerned with castes marred this relation and they disrupted a good and healthy social life.

Next, Vallalar directed his attack against the materialistic tendencies of the people. In their mad race after wealth and pompous life, they ignored spirituality and human values and even ignored the poor and destitute who asked for help. They were always eager to accumulate and possess wealth, but not to share it with the suffering humanity. So he condemned these in two ways.

1. He directly censured them for their unsympathetic attitude towards the poor and the suffering.
2. He took the blame upon himself and in a confessing mood divulges all the evil tendencies of the materialistic-minded people and their unsympathetic treatment of the poor, as if he did all these cruel deeds.

In the 32nd poem of the IIInd Volume of the Sixth book, he addresses the rich as follows :

"You boast yourselves that you are living a life full of honour and prestige. You do not seem to think of God to pray to him when your physical and mental faculties are intact. You move among people, wrapped in silk and bedecked with jewels. You will not have the time even to look at the hungry in the street. Oh, mad people, how much you take away from the world?"

Ramalinga attacked the people who did money-lending business and criticised their selfish and covetous nature. He complained that they have made it a point to charge exorbitant rates of interest on the loans. They hoarded tons of money, but rarely gave away anything in charity ; they did not stir out, lest they should be asked for help

and they did not take note of their surroundings. Poverty and suffering around did not move them to acts of charity.

The saint grieved at the poverty prevalent in the society. The economic inequality in the society in so far as it had left a few people with abundance of wealth and the others in utter poverty unnerved him. He observed that he felt as if his mind and body were burning at the sight of poverty. He could not tolerate this state of affairs and hence appealed to the Lord to have mercy on the people so as to remove such disharmony in society.

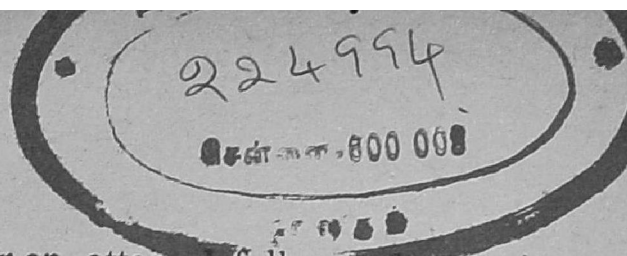
At the same time Vallalar disapproved of the poor approaching the rich for help. For his own part, he did not ask the rich for help. In one of his letters to Irukkam Rathina Mudaliar, he refused to ask for a certain help from one Somu Chettiar, despite the request of the former. Also, he dissuaded him from approaching the rich for any help.

All these go to show that he indirectly condemned the economic state of the society in which people have to beg others for the necessities of life. He confined himself merely to indicate the evil; he did not lead a campaign against the rich. But when opportunity came, he established the Sanctuary for Eternal Service, at Vadalur, to feed all the poor irrespective of their sex, caste, religion and nation. Thus, his reform was on the positive side. Poets and saints have written and preached against the woes caused by hunger and poverty; but it was only St. Ramalinga who turned such thoughts into action and founded an institution for the relief of hunger. He launched a non-violent project to eradicate hunger from the society. He wanted his example to be followed by others.

The three jewels of vallalar are : Casteless society, Jeevakarunya (humanitarianism) and Sanmarga (the righteous path). The first included within itself religious toleration and universalism, the second, later on, developed into the concept of Ahimsa, and the third became Ramarajya of Gandhiji.

Whether it is Rammohun Roy or Ramalinga or Ramakrishna, each one of them played a considerable part in reforming the caste-ridden and superstitious Hindu Society. Socially, all worked for unity and universality. All of them stood for ahimsa and religious tolera-





tion. It is their thoughts which, later on, attained fuller perfection in the social ideologies of Gandhism. In other words, Gandhism is an outcome of the influence of the social ethics of these great reformers.

Mahatmaji spared no pains to stress on a casteless society. On the institution of caste, he wrote thus : "I have frequently said that I do not believe in caste in the modern sense. It is an excrescence and a handicap on progress. Nor do I believe in inequalities between human beings. We are all absolutely equal. But equality is of souls and not bodies. Hence, it is a mental state. We need not think of, or assert, equality because we see great inequalities in the physical world. We have to realize equality in the midst of this apparent external inequality. Assumption of superiority by any person over another is a sin against God and Man. Thus, caste, in so far as it connotes distinctions in status, is an evil. I do, however, believe in *Varna* which is based on hereditary occupations. *Varnas* are four to mark four universal occupations - imparting knowledge, defending the defenceless, carrying on agriculture and commerce, and performing service through physical labour. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduisim, having recognised them as the law of our being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. Gravitation affects us all, whether one knows its existence or not. But scientists who knew the law have made it yield results that have startled the world. Even so, has Hinduism startled the world by its discovery and application of the law of *Varna* ? When Hindus were seized with inertia, abuse of *varna* resulted in innumerable castes, with unnecessary and harmful restrictions. The law of *Varna* has nothing to do with these restrictions. People of different *Varnas* may inter-marry and interdine. These restrictions may be necessary in the interests of chastity and hygiene. But a Brahmana who marries a Shudra girl or vice versa, commits no offence against the law of *Varna*." But for Gandhiji's efforts the Harijans would not have attained a position of any social dignity. Throughout his life, he fought against the evils of caste. He encouraged intercaste marriages and set examples in this direction from his own family. His son Devadass married the daughter of Rajaji and many intercaste marriages were effected under his blessings.

On intercaste marriage, Gandhiji's view was that though there is no prohibition against such marriages in Varnashrama, there can be no compulsion. According to Gandhiji "it must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine."

"Untouchability", he said, "is a sin against God and man and is like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism."

Next, the Mahatma stressed on religious toleration. His prayer meetings were attended by members of various religions. Christian and Muslim prayers were chanted at such meetings.

Again, he laid the greatest emphasis on Ahimsa. Indeed it was his great weapon of self-defence. It is said that in the doctrine of Ahimsa we find an antidote to the atom bomb. Above all, Gandhiji stressed on a righteous and truthful life.

All these ideas of social ethics were ideas and ideals which were evolved in the 19th century by the social reformers. The movement was from a caste ridden society to a casteless society; from superstition to reason; from sectarianism to cosmopolitanism and universalism; from himsa to Ahimsa and from narrow-minded exclusiveness to broad minded patriotism and nationalism. These social transformations paved the way for the evolution of a national awakening in India. Indeed they served as the basis for national awakening from which arose the Swaraj movement which will form the theme of my next talk.



### LECTURE III

## THE SWADESHI MOVEMENT IN THE PRE-GANDHIAN ERA

In my first talk I traced the growth of political ethics in India in the pre-Gandhian era and stressed that the developments in the pre-Gandhian period paved the way for the evolution of the Gandhian political ideas and ideals. In the second talk I confined my thoughts to the circumstances which led to the evolution of social ethics in the pre-Gandhian period. This evening I shall dwell on the Swadeshi ideas in the pre-Gandhian era. In fact the first two factors played their own part in shaping the third factor. All these are in a sense inter-related factors.

Many are under the mistaken impression that the Swadeshi movement arose with the advent of the Congress, in 1885. This however is not true. In fact, the movement was an outcome of the decline of handicrafts which occurred in the second half of the 19th century. Long before England became an industrial power, India was famous for her handicrafts. The "Dacca Muslin" had an international reputation. All the world knew it and people in every Country wore it. The Asoka Pillar of Delhi is another evidence of the skill and workmanship of our blacksmiths. A wide variety of goods such as woolen and silk textiles, leather goods, brass and metal works, steel products and jewellery items, produced in the cottages of the artisans, revealed the skill of the ancient Indian worker. As the Industrial Commission of 1918 rightly observed "At a time when the rest of Europe, the birth place of the modern industrial system, was inhabited by uncivilized tribes, India was famous for the wealth of her rulers and for the high artistic skill of her craftsmen." Again, as pointed out by Weber, the skill of the Indians in the production of delicate woven fabrics, in the mixing of colours, the working of metals and precious stones, the preparation of essences and in all manner of technical arts, has from early times, enjoyed a world wide celebrity.

But with the advent of the British, our ancient industries fell on evil days. The East India Company followed a selfish and cruel policy of discouraging Indian industries with a view to help the newly

established industries of England. As R. C. Dutt rightly puts it, "The policy was pursued with unwavering resolution and with fatal success ; orders were sent out to force Indian artisans to work in the Company's factories ; commercial residents were legally vested with extensive powers over villages and communities of Indian Weavers ; Prohibitive tariffs excluded Indian silks and cotton goods from England ; English goods were admitted in India free of duty or on payment of nominal duty." In short, India was converted into a mere agricultural colony for supplying raw materials for the British industry and for serving as a market for their manufactures.

As a consequence, the skilled Indian artisan, who had an international reputation for producing superfine muslin cloth, was discouraged in every way. In course of time Dacca ceased to be known for her trade in Muslin. Competition from the Lancashire manufacturer practically ruined the Indian cotton textile industry. What is worse, the English educated Indian had a preference for the foreign made mill goods and other manufactures. The non-interference policy of the British Government and the free trade movement practically killed the glory of ancient Indian industries and our handicrafts declined and perished. However, the event acted as a powerful factor in developing a Swadeshi spirit. Thus, the seeds of the Swadeshi movement were sown as early as the 19th century. But this relates to only to the economic aspect of Swadeshi. There are other aspects of it too and they relate to the religious and the political spheres.

### *The Gospel of Swadeshi*

Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to the use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the remote in the basic necessities of life. In the field of ethics, if a person restricts himself to his ancestral religion and effectively uses his immediate religious surroundings, it may be called as Swadeshi in the religious sphere. But if he finds his ancient religion defective, he has to purge it of its defects. In the domain of politics, if we make use of indigenous institutions and serve them by curing them of their proved defects, we are said to practice Swadeshi in politics. In the sphere of economics, if we use only goods that are produced by our immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and



complete where they might be found defective we are said to observe Swadeshi.

These three branches of Swadeshi may be examined in detail, Gandhiji felt that Hinduism had become a conservative religion. It is a mighty force because of the Swadeshi spirit underlying it and is the most tolerant because it is nonproselytizing and is capable of expansion. It has succeeded not in driving out Buddhism but in absorbing it. By reason of the Swadeshi spirit, a Hindu refuses to change his religion, not necessarily because he considers it to be the best, but because he knows that he can complement it by introducing reforms. What is said of Hinduism in this regard is true of other religions too. One factor which we have to remember in the religious aspect of Swadeshi is that all the religious reformers from Ram-mohun Roy to Vallalar and from Vallalar to Gandhi accepted Hinduism as their basic faith and sought to cure it of its defects. The greatest blot of Hinduism in the pre-Gandhian era was the caste system and its concomitants of untouchability and unapproachability. Our religious reformers spared no pains to cure the religion of this evil. Rajaram Mohun Roy's main plank of criticism was directed against the social evils of SATI and casteism. So also was the attitude of the Arya Samajists. Vallalar strove hard to free the society of the evil of caste. Similarly, other religious reformers such as Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sree Narayana Guru and, of course, Periyar Ramaswamy, devoted their whole life and energy for freeing Hinduism of its defects. Their thinking was essentially Swadeshi in character and in the process of reformation they were able to absorb the best features of other religions. Thus, the religious aspect of Swadeshi in the Pre-Gandhian era was found in the preachings and teachings of Hindu saints and socio-religious reformers. These ideas influenced the thinking of Gandhiji who said that "Hinduism is the ancient or Swadeshi religion of India and if cured of its evils, it is the best and most tolerant of all religions."

Next, we examine the Swadeshi spirit in politics. The indigenous institutions in the shape of village Panchayats constitute the Swadeshi elements in politics. India has really been a republican country. The ancient Panchayat system has survived every shock it has received. Princes and potentates, whether they were Indians or

foreigners, had hardly touched the vast masses except for collecting revenue. The latter in their turn seem to have rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar's. The vast organization of caste answered not only to the religious wants of the people but also to their political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system and through it dealt with all opposition from the governing powers. However, with the advent of the British we made a fatal departure from this Swadeshi spirit. The educated classes in India received their education from the Westerners in the foreign tongue and this prevented them from reaching the masses. We had desired to represent the masses and in this attempt we failed to achieve the real objective. Our understanding of the masses was in no way different from that of the British, whose objective was only exploitation. Hence, there is a break. In the resulting process, there is a want of communication between the representatives and the represented. If our education in the past had been through vernaculars, there would not have been the gap in thinking or knowledge between the common man and the administrators. If that had happened, the village Panchayats would be now a living force in a special way and the country would have had a self Government suited to her requirements. All attempts to revive the Panchayat Raj have not brought the best in it, as it has not been effectively linked with the rest of the administration. Also, decentralisation of power, as conceived by Mahatmaji, was not achieved. On this aspect of Swadeshi, there have been solid contributions in the pre-Gandhian era. Most of the social reformers spoke and wrote on the need for the retention and proper development of the Panchayat system. The leaders of the Brahmosamaj, Aryasamaj, Ramakrishna Mission and even Saint Ramalinga suggested this aspect of Swadeshi, directly or indirectly. But they found their full expression and acquired a pattern only in the work and the writings of Mahatma Gandhi.

The third aspect, namely, the economic aspect, is the most important and popular aspect. Much of the deep poverty of the masses is due to the ruinous departure from Swadeshi in the economic and industrial life. If not even a single article of commerce had been brought from outside India, she would today undoubtedly be a land flowing with milk and honey. But that was not to be, we were greedy and so was England. It was her declared policy that India was to be held in trust for her people. If this be true, Lancashire must



have stood aside. And if the Swadeshi doctrine be a sound doctrine, Lancashire could have stood aside without being hurt, though it might have sustained a shock for some time. Gandhiji thought of Swadeshi not as a boycott movement undertaken by way of revenge, but as a religious principle to be followed by all. "India cannot live for Lancashire or any other country before she is able to live for herself. And she can live for herself only if she produces and is helped to produce everything for her requirements within her own borders. She need not be, she ought not to be, drawn into the vortex of mad and ruinous competition which breeds fratricide, jealousy and many other evils. But who is to stop her great millionaires from entering into the world of competition?"

If we follow the Swadeshi doctrine, it should be our duty to find out neighbours who can supply our wants and to teach them to supply the wants where they do not know how to proceed assuming that there are neighbours who are in want of healthy occupation. Then, every village of India will almost be a self-supporting and self-contained unit, exchanging only such necessary commodities with other villages as are not locally producible.

Gandhiji continues: "It has often been urged that India cannot adopt Swadeshi in the economic life at any rate. Those who advance this objection do not look upon Swadeshi as a rule of life. With them it is a mere partiotic effort - not to be made if it involved any self-denials. Swadeshi, as defined here, is a religious discipline to be undergone in utter disregard of the physical discomfort it may cause to individuals. Under its spell the deprivation of a pin or a needle, because these are not manufactured in India, need cause no terror. A Swadeshite will learn to do without the hundreds of things which today he considers necessary. Moreover, those who dismiss Swadeshi, from their minds by arguing the impossible, forget that Swadeshi, after all, is a goal to be reached by steady effort. And we would be making for the goal even if we confined Swadeshi to a given set of articles allowing ourselves as a temporary measure to use such things as might not be procurable in the Country."

All these ideas of Gandhiji were evolved from a proper understanding of the Hindu religion. These ideas were already there. The only difference was they did not have a pattern which evolved out of the

contributions of nationalists who lived prior to him as well as from those who were his contemporaries. Among many others those of R.C. Dutt, Tilak, Rabindranath Tagore, Subramanya Bharathi and V. O. Chindambaram Pillai stand out prominent.

On the economic side, Romesh Chander Dutt made solid contributions to the Swadeshi Movement. He was an ardent advocate of Swadeshi. His ideas on this matter were more or less similar to that of Ranade. As early as 1901 he remarked: "It is not desirable and it is not possible to Europeanise Indian life. The people of India are able to judge for themselves what is best for themselves and Indian life and Hindu life has always proved itself capable of assimilating what is good for itself. It is because we have been able to assimilate all needful reforms from generation to generation and from age to age, that our ancient Hindu life exists in India when so many phases of ancient life have passed away in other countries like Persia, Egypt and Babylon." Again he said, "We in India have an ancient and noble civilization. Our Children's children will live to see the day when India will take her place among the nations of the earth in the manufacturing industry and commercial enterprise, in representative institutions and in real social advancement. May that day dawn early for India."

Balagangadar Tilak devoted all his energies for the development of the economic aspect of Swadeshi. He organised the Swadeshi and boycott movements. No man preached the concept of Swadeshi so strongly as Tilak did. He had a disciple in the South in the person of V.O. Chidambaram Pillai. What Tilak did for the North, was done more effectively in the South by V. O. C. He organized a boycott movement and propagated against the use of foreign goods. Again, he organised a native shipping company. He felt that trade is the main strength of the British and if that is adversely affected they will leave the country. In order to achieve this he organized a native shipping service.

Rabindranath Tagore roused the feelings of nationalism and Swadeshi through his poetry. He filled the gap in Bengali literature caused by the passing away of Bankim Chandra Chatterji who gave us the song *Vande Mataram* which was India's popular National Anthem before the dawn of Independence. India's National Anthem, Jana



Gana Mana is Tagore's rare contribution. He stressed on the need for hand spinning much more than Gandhiji. It is said that once Gandhiji suggested to Tagore to take to the spinning wheel at least for half an hour every day. The poet sage would not agree, and he remarked: "Why not eight and a half hours if it will help the country?"

The South too produced a national poet in the name of Subramanya Bharati who by his soul stirring songs carried the idea of the Swadeshi spirit to every home. He, along with his friend Subramanya Siva, made Swadeshi their religion.

Mahatma Gandhi, as pointed out earlier, made Swadeshi his religion. He looked upon the economic side of it as a humanitarian industrial policy. This meant a glorified revival of hand-spinning, for through it alone can pauperism, which is blighting the lives of millions of human beings, in their own cottages in India, be immediately removed. Everything else may thereafter be added, so as to increase the productive capacity of this Country. Gandhiji said, "I would, therefore, have all young men with a scientific training to utilize their skill in making the spinning wheel, if it is possible, a more efficient instrument of production in India's cottages."

He further said, "the problem with us is not how to find leisure for the teeming millions inhabiting our villages. The problem is how to utilise their idle hours, which are equal to the working days of six months in the year. Strange as it may appear, every mill generally is a menace to the villagers. I have not worked out the figures, but I am quite safe in saying that every mill-hand does the work of at least ten labourers doing the same work in their villages. In other words, he earns more than he did in his village at the expense of ten fellow-villagers. Thus, spinning and weaving mills have deprived the villagers of a substantial means of livelihood. It is no answer in reply to say that they turn out cheaper, better cloth, if they do so at all. For, if they have displaced thousands of workers, the cheaper mill cloth is dearer than the dearest Khadi woven in the villages. Coal is not dear for the coal miner who can use it there and then nor is Khadi dear for the villager who manufactures his own Khadi. But if the cloth manufactured in mills displaces village hands, rice mills and flour

mills not only displace thousands of poor women workers, but damage the health of the whole population in the bargain. Where people have no objection to taking flesh diet and can afford it, while flour and polished rice may do no harm, but in India, where millions can get no flesh diet even where they have no objection to eating it, if they can get it, it is sinful to deprive them of nutritious and vital elements contained in whole wheat meal and unpolished rice. \* It is time medical men and others combined to instruct the people on the danger attendant upon the use of white flour and polished rice."

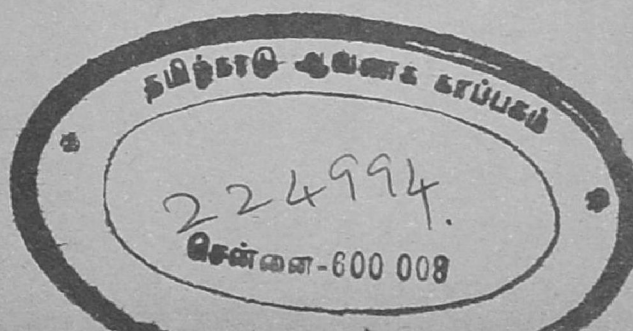
Again, as early as 1934, he wrote in the Harijan "Our duty is to investigate the possibility of keeping in existence the village wheel, the village crusher and the village pounder, and, by advertising their products, discovering their qualities, ascertaining the condition of the workers and the number displaced by the power-driven machinery and discovering the methods of improving them, whilst restraining their village character, to enable them to stand the competition of the mills. How terribly and criminally we have neglected them! Here there is no antagonism to the textile or the sugar or the rice mills. Their products must be preferred to the corresponding foreign products. If they were in danger of extinction from foreign competition, they should receive the needed support. But they stand in no such need. They are flourishing in spite of foreign competition. What it needed is protection of the village crafts and the workers behind them from the crushing competition of the power-driven machinery, whether it is worked in India or in foreign lands.

The concept may be summarised in the words of the Father of the Nation who wrote, "In a nutshell, of the things we use, we should restrict our purchases to the articles which villages manufacture. Their manufactures may be crude. We must try to induce them to improve their workmanship, and not dismisses them because foreign articles or even articles produced in cities, that is big factories, are superior. In other words, we should evoke the artistic talent of the villager. In this manner shall we replay somewhat the debt we owe to them. We need not be frightened by the thought whether we shall ever succeed in such an effort. Within our own times we can recall instances where we have not been baffled by the difficulty of our tasks when we have known that they were essential for the nation's progress.



If, therefore, we as individuals believe that revivification of India's villages is a necessity of our existence, if we believe that thereby only can we root out untouchability and feel one with all, no matter to what community or religion they may belong, we must mentally go back to the villages and treat them as our pattern, instead of putting the city life before them for imitation. If this is the correct attitude, then, naturally, we begin with ourselves and thus use, say, hand-made paper instead of mill-made, use village reed, wherever possible, instead of the fountain pen or the pen holder, ink made in the villages instead of the big factories etc. I can multiply instances of this nature. There is hardly anything of daily use in the home which the villagers have not made before and cannot make even now. If we preform the mental trick and fix our gaze upon them, we immediately put millions of rupees into the pockets of the villagers, whereas at the present moment we are exploiting the villagers without making any return worth the name. It is time we arrested the progress of the tragedy."

Thus, the Gandhian Gospel of Swadeshi is a product of time, circumstances and tradition besides a deeprooted love of the land. There have been earlier contributions to it; there has been earlier thinking on it, and, there have been earlier traditions. The pre-Gandhian thought was actually a preparation for the Gandhian thinking. May be the pattern was not there; but the facts were there. Gandhiji gathered them, arranged them, and gave shape to them. In this sense he was an architect. Now it is left for us to translate his thoughts into action. In fact, we should have done it long ago. Even now it is not late. What had been done in the direction of Swadeshi is meagre. Much more has to be done in the coming years. It is the only broad based solution for the country's ills. All the three aspects of the Swadeshi have to see their implementation side. They were hitherto mere thoughts; they have to be translated into practice. The best is yet to be.



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| 1. India of my Dreams                            | ... M.K.Gandhi                        |
| 2. Gandhis' Challenge to Communism               | ... G. N. Dikshit                     |
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