

HARIJAN

(FOUNDED BY MAHATMA GANDHI)

Editor: K. G. MASHRUWALA

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TWO ANNAS

AN INDIAN GOVERNOR

(By M. K. Gandhi)

1. An Indian Governor should, in his own person and in his surroundings, be a teetotaler. Without this, prohibition of the fiery liquid is well-nigh inconceivable.

2. He and his surroundings should represent hand-spinning as a visible token of identification with the dumb millions of India, a token of the necessity of 'bread labour' and organized non-violence as against organized violence on which the society of today seems to be based.

3. He must dwell in a cottage accessible to all, though easily shielded from gaze, if he is to do efficient work. The British Governor naturally represented British might. For him and his was erected a fortified residence—a palace to be occupied by him and his numerous vassals who sustained his empire. The Indian prototype may keep somewhat pretentious buildings for receiving princes and ambassadors of the world. For these, being guests of the Governor should constitute an education in what "Even Unto This Last"—equality of all—should mean in concrete terms. For him no expensive furniture, foreign or indigenous. Plain living and high thinking must be his motto, not to adorn his entrance but to be exemplified in daily life.

4. For him there can be no untouchability in any form whatsoever, no caste or creed or colour distinction. He must represent the best of all religions and all things Eastern or Western. Being a citizen of India, he must be a citizen of the world. Thus simply, one reads, did the Khalif Omar, with millions of treasure at his feet, live; thus lived Janaka of ancient times; thus lived, as I saw him, the Master of Eton in his residence in the midst of, and surrounded by, the sons of the Lords and Nabobs of the British Isles. Will the Governors of India of the famished millions do less?

5. He will speak the language of the province of which he is the Governor and Hindustani, the lingua franca of India written in the Nagari or Urdu script. This is neither Sanskritized Hindi nor Persianized Urdu. Hindustani is emphatically the language which is spoken by the millions north of the Vindhya Range.

This does not pretend to be an exhaustive list of the virtues that an Indian Governor should represent. It is merely illustrative.

Calcutta, 17-8-47

Harijan, 24-8-47

PROHIBITION CRITICISM ANSWERED

(By M. K. Gandhi)

[The following article was written by the Father of the Nation fifteen years ago. It was a clarion call to all Congress Ministries to start implement the promise of achieving Prohibition the moment the Congress came to power. The promise still remains unfulfilled, and the Congress is now functioning as Government under a free Constitution of India.

The criticism made against the reform was then and is now of the same nature. The answers given fifteen years ago, are as fresh today as they were then. Will the Planning Commission and the State Governments heed to this voice that brought freedom to our land?

16-4-52

— M. P. Desai]

How can total prohibition be brought about immediately if at all? By 'immediately' I mean an immediate planned declaration bringing about total prohibition not later than three years from 14th July, 1937, the date of the taking of office by the first Congress Ministry. I imagine that it is quite possible to bring it about in two years. But not being aware of administrative difficulties I put down three years. I count loss of this revenue as of no account whatsoever. Prohibition will remain a far cry, if the Congress is to count the cost in a matter of first class national importance.

Let it be remembered that this drink and drugs revenue is a form of extremely degrading taxation. All taxation to be healthy must return tenfold to the tax-payer in the form of necessary services. Excise makes people pay for their own corruption, moral, mental and physical. It falls like a dead-weight on those who are least able to bear it. The revenue is largely derived, I believe, from industrial labour which together with field labour the Congress almost exclusively represents.

The loss of revenue is only apparent. Removal of this degrading tax enables the drinker, i.e. the tax-payer to earn and spend better. Apart, therefore, from the tremendous gain, it means a substantial economic gain, to the nation.

I put this prohibition in the forefront because its result is immediate; Congressmen and especially women have bled for it; national

prestige will rise in a manner it cannot by any single act that I can conceive, and the other five provinces are highly likely to follow the six. The Mussalman non-Congress Prime Ministers are equally interested in seeing India sober rather than drunk.

The cry of great expenditure in preventing illicit distillation is thoughtless where it is not hypocritical. India is not America. The American example is a hindrance rather than a help to us. In America drinking carries no shame with it. It is the fashion there to drink. It reflects the greatest credit on the determined minority in America that by sheer force of its moral weight it was able to carry through the prohibition measure however short-lived it was. I do not regard that experiment to have been a failure. I do not despair of America once more returning to it with still greater fervour and better experience in dealing with it. It may be that if India carries out prohibition it will hasten the advent of prohibition in America. In no part of the world is prohibition as easy to carry out as in India, for with us it is only a minority that drinks. Drinking is generally considered respectable. And there are millions, I believe, who have never known what drink is.

But why should prevention of illicit distillation cost any more than prevention of other crimes? I should make illicit distillation heavily punishable and think no more about it. Some of it will go on perhaps till Doomsday as thieving will. I would not set up a special agency to pry into illicit distilleries. But I would punish any one found drunk though not disorderly (in the legal sense) in streets or other public places with a substantial fine or alternatively with indeterminate imprisonment to end when the erring one has earned his or her keep.

This, however, is the negative part. Voluntary organizations especially manned by women will work in the labour areas. They will visit those who are addicted to drink and try to wean them from the habit. Employers of labour will be expected by law to provide cheap, healthy refreshment, reading and entertainment rooms where the working men can go and find shelter, knowledge, health-giving food and drink and innocent fun.

Thus prohibition means a type of adult education of the nation and not merely a closing down of grog shops.

Prohibition should begin by preventing any new shop from being licensed and closing some that are in danger of becoming a nuisance to the public. How far the latter is possible without having to pay heavy compensation I do not know. In any case, generally, licences that lapse should not be renewed. No new shops should be opened on any account. Whatever immediately is possible in law should be done without a moment's thought so far as the revenue is concerned.

But what is the meaning or extent of total prohibition? Total prohibition is prohibition against sales of intoxicating drinks and drugs, except under medical prescription by a practitioner licensed for the purpose and to be purchasable only at Government depots maintained therefor. Foreign liquors in prescribed quantity may be imported for the use of Europeans who cannot or will not do without their drink. These will also be sold in bottles in select areas and under authorized certificates. Hotels and restaurants will cease to sell intoxicating drinks.

Harijan, 31-7-'37

TO THE PLANNING COMMISSION

All know why Governments are hesitating to implement their Prohibition promises. The cause is mainly economic—they are not prepared to lose easy income from excise. One may grant that a sudden loss of this revenue may create a little headache and worry to the administrator or Finance Minister. It might be, therefore, necessary to graduate this cut in the public revenue, say during the course of two, three years. But it is in no sense an argument to stand still and not move at all. But the point is more serious and fundamental:—Is it wise statesmanship and sound economics to collect such income? I may be pardoned to quote Hermann Levy from his book *Drink*. While discussing this aspect of the drink revenue, he says—

“Drink always was and still is one of the most favourite means of public finance..... Yet it is very doubtful whether the drawing of large amounts of revenue from sources which give rise to permanent stimuli to wasteful spending—which is not even much repressed by high taxation—can be regarded as a policy conforming to the fundamental principles of sound economics.” (P. 102).

I hope the Planning Commission, which is not a mere economic body but which claims to plan for the good and healthy life and prosperity of the nation, will take this aspect of the question in view and plan a graded course for securing Prohibition in the whole land within the next two or three years. This at least we all owe to the Father of the Nation.

15-4-'52

M. P. DESAI

By Mahatma Gandhi

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LET US STOP TO THINK

In my article *Straight from the Heart* I have suggested the discontinuance of Air Services as one of the desirable steps towards a free, happy and self-sufficient India. Most people will probably be astonished at such an idea, and even laugh it to scorn. That is simply because they do not stop to think. If they did reflect for a moment, they would see that it is by no means a laughable matter, and deserves fullest consideration. I invite them to give me a few minutes' attention, by reading the following lines.

It should be clearly understood from the beginning that we are aiming at a truly democratic state of society which will give full advantage to the people who produce the fundamental needs of life.

In the first place let us consider who make use of the Air Services. It is the rich, the Government representatives and the military. Are these services of any use to the peasantry and labourers? None at all. On the contrary the poor are the losers, in that the wealthy and the Government are tempted to waste more and more money; all of which originally comes from the sweat of the poor man's brow,—I say "waste money", because there is no actual benefit.

Take the civil population. One man flies because the other man flies. Very likely both feel in their heart of hearts they would rather not. But they would be ashamed to say so, and they also must not get left behind in business, in politics, and even in fashion. So the mad race goes on. But supposing they all stopped flying? Then no one need feel ashamed, and no one would get left behind. There would come a sense of relief.

Then there is another vital point. Man's psychic and physical make-up is not suited to flying. However strong or brilliant a man may be, he is not at his best after reaching a place by air. When a Minister rushes to England in a few hours for Conferences he is not in anything like so fit a condition to deal with the weighty problems in hand as he would be if he had gone by sea, and had a fortnight's respite to reflect on the world situation, on what he is doing, and where he is going, and time physically to relax and enjoy the fine sea air. By flying, man, as it were, outruns his own mental equilibrium, and physically also his body cannot adjust itself properly to such violent changes of climate, diet and material surroundings, which, in its turn, have a detrimental effect on the mind. So what is the advantage? Some people will argue that flying is bringing the nations of the world nearer together. I would say, only in the matter of time, which in itself is a man-made illusion. In all other respects flying is taking the nations of the world further apart. People nowadays see nothing of the countries they pass over, and remarkably little even of the countries they visit, beyond the airports and modernized cities. It is all unnatural and unhealthy. Flying has also led to the increase of interference, and poking of the nose, by powerful nations into the affairs of weaker ones, poisoning the international atmosphere. If people would rush about a little less and attend to their own affairs at home it would be much better. In the same way it would be much better for internal affairs if people kept quieter. India would certainly be better governed if Ministers kept their feet on the ground, and made less speeches!

Now let us consider the military aspect. In *Straight from the Heart*, I have put forward disbandment of the Army and Navy. This automatically puts an end to military flying. At the same time we should dismantle all air stations and landing grounds, and make the whole of India inhospitable to air-craft by planting trees, digging, trenching and so forth, in all strategic open spaces and tracts. This would have far-reaching protective advantages both military and civil.

From the international point of view, if only the world could make up its mind to abandon flying, it would find

itself freed of one of its worst worries—airial bombing. The atom bomb, gas bomb, and all other bomb terrors would subside, and man would feel as if he has awakened out of a frightful nightmare. It would also be a much easier and more practical thing to check up on banned air-craft than to check up on banned bombs.

If the advantages and disadvantages of flying are intelligently and honestly weighed, the scales go down heavily on the disadvantage side. The advantages indeed are all an illusion and therefore as light as air. I cannot think of any which are real and solid.

Yet man goes on inventing still faster and faster methods of getting about. Like all other material passions it is insatiable, and will, as sure as fate, lead man to his ruin, if not checked.

Unfortunately there is little chance of modern man having the strength to throw off completely this evil habit of artificial speed (which is just like a drug), but at least he should be able to pull himself together sufficiently to give up flying. It is absurd and childish in the extreme, to accept every new invention as an advance! The invention of air-craft has been definitely harmful to man, and it should be recognized for what it is—a curse.

With this, as with disarmament, it is India's natural birthright to lead the way to a saner and happier world.

Gopal Ashram,
P. O. Pilkhi,
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U. P., 8-12-'51

MIRA

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HARIJAN

April 26

1952

BIG V. SMALL SCHEMES

Principal S. N. Agarwal writes :

In the course of his recent address to the Silver Jubilee session of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry at New Delhi, the Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru is reported by the P.T.I. to have observed that

"He had started feeling more and more that greater stress should be laid on smaller schemes of national reconstruction rather than on big ones. But whatever was done in the field of planning or implementing big projects, it should be seen that for their working after completion no foreign aid was necessary."

The above observation by Pandit Nehru is surely welcome if it really indicates any substantial change in the economic and industrial policy of the Government of India. So far, the Government has been showing inordinate fondness for "big" schemes which a poor country like India can ill afford under the present circumstances. Several of these schemes have come to grief for various reasons; some of them had to be abandoned after wasting crores of rupees in the initial stages because they were later on found to be uneconomic and too costly. The implementation of these "big" and grandiose schemes including the River Valley Projects has set in motion a chain of foreign capital and foreign experts specially from the United States. The Prime Minister expresses the hope that after their completion no foreign aid would be necessary; but unless and until India is able to produce its own heavy machinery and spare parts required for installing giant schemes such a hope would remain only a pious dream.

In India, the basic problem that constantly stares us in the face is that of poverty, unemployment and, what is even more, under-employment. We have abundant man-power but very scarce capital resources; we, therefore, naturally require labour-intensive rather than capital-intensive schemes of national reconstruction. If full employment is to be assured to the millions of unemployed and underemployed rural population in our country, the Government must launch a large number of "small" schemes which would not only provide ample work for the rural areas but also make every village in India feel the "glow" of Swaraj. Today, the villagers are not much impressed by huge schemes taking shape at distant places; they are interested in their own villages and want something to be done for their economic welfare quickly and before their own eyes. During my recent election tours in the villages I noticed intense hunger for land, for village roads, for wells and minor irrigation works, for small village schools and hospitals. The village folk are also prepared to contribute their own manual labour for the welfare schemes, provided they are able to see the fruits of their labour in the near future and in their own locality. That is why Gandhiji attached so much importance to decentralized socio-economic planning and constructive work. Such small village schemes do not wait for the import of foreign capital and foreign "experts" and "advisers"; they can be implemented locally and quickly.

This does not mean that there should be no big schemes at all. But these should be minimized and ought to be confined to the basic or key industries. The main plank of our national reconstruction should

be based on the foundations of numerous small schemes widely spread over the rural areas. Let us hope that the Government of India and the Planning Commission would now introduce this healthy change in their outlook while preparing the final Five-Year Plan.

The *Times of India* (31st March) report is rather different from the P.T.I. report quoted above. The former says as follows :

"Mr Nehru said that he had come to feel more and more that greater stress should be laid on small community development projects of the type established at Faridabad and Nilokheri, rather than on any big schemes of industrialization."

The P.T.I. report does not refer to the Faridabad, Nilokheri projects at all. The Hindi report in the *Hindustan* of New Delhi seems to give a verbatim report of the speech which was made in Hindi. A specific reference has been made in it to the above projects, following a general statement in favour of small schemes as opposed to big ones. Though the two parts are separated from each other by other observations, from the tenor of the speech, it is reasonable to infer that by smaller schemes Shri Nehru had in his mind only the schemes of the kind specifically referred to above.

From the reports that I have seen, Faridabad, Nilokheri and Etawah are not projects of the same type. Of the three Etawah alone seems to have been conceived of with a village outlook, even if of a different pattern from that conceived of by the Gramodyog Sangh (Village Industries Association). Experience alone will show what corrections and adjustments both will need.

Etawah has not been specifically mentioned in Shri Jawaharlal Nehru's speech. One does not know if he has greater attraction for Faridabad and Nilokheri or for Etawah. If it is the former two it is still an approach of as doubtful value as that to big ones. They will have to depend as much upon continuous foreign imports as the big projects. They cannot be self-reliant and self-sufficient. I am not sure if the same will be true of the Etawah project. Let me hope Shri Nehru's expectations will be fulfilled at least by Etawah type projects.

Speaking generally, from big industrial projects to the small township projects is a great climb down. But I feel we shall have to be still more realistic (or idealistic, according to the way you look at it) and get to a still lower level for some years to come. Instead of planning to encourage crowded townships, with factories, luxury houses etc. we shall have to think of attending to every hamlet in its own place and making it a fully productive, fully employed and self-supporting unit. The former give employment to a few people with high remunerations. They attract from the neighbouring villages a larger number of people who do not find employment and create insoluble problems. The standard of living of a few is raised at the expense of the many. Ultimately, they lead to robberies, dacoities, revolutionary activities and murders.

The political solution devised for them is periodical wars which may in modern civilization take the form of total destruction by means as foul as atom, petrol and bacteriological bombs.

Whether our schemes are big or small, so long as schemes and science are linked with trade, commerce and a large army of top-heavy, technical, and administrative staff, — whether in Government, industry or commerce, — they cannot bring happiness to mankind. There would be starvation and unemployment in the midst of plenty, suppression of freedom and individuality in the name of law and order, making robots of men in the name of technological advance, and constant destruction of men and materials produced at enormous expense.

Any way, I hope Shri Jawaharlal Nehru will advance still deeper in his ideas about smaller schemes and, instead of building a few new up-to-date townships, will proceed to rebuild villages which are in a state of disintegration on account of neglect and exploitation by cities.

Wardha, 7-4-'52

K. G. MASHRUWALA

AT THE CROSS ROADS *

I — The Food Problem

Yesterday I described to you in brief outline the technique of action that Gandhiji evolved out of his basic disciplines and how he used that technique to win India's freedom. Let us now see how application of that technique can enable us to realize the fruits of freedom and to sustain that freedom.

Democracy is a plant of slow growth. It needs patience, peace and staying power. Let us see what will give these to us in the easiest and quickest manner.

Translated in terms of the millions, the four ingredients of democracy are food, clothing, health and individual freedom. Let us take the question of food first.

We are faced with a crisis on the food front. Last year we had to import 2 million tons. This year (1951) the corresponding figure will be 5 million tons. In the coming year (1952) we are told, there will be a food deficit of nearly 7 million tons. The problem, it has been stated, has been accentuated by the steady growth of our population.

As an immediate solution, the Government resorted to the policy of imported food from abroad at the cost of nearly 100 to 150 crores of rupees every year. For long term solution there is a tendency to promote large-sized consolidated holdings and mechanized farming, helped with fertilizers — natural and chemical — imported or home-produced. Should an uncovered margin be still left, and the Planning Commission tell us, it is likely to be left, the gap is to be filled by importing food, the cost being met by our earnings from the export of raw material and manufac-

tured goods.. In practice, this has actually led to the Government substituting non-food-crops like jute and cotton, in certain parts, for food crops.

Internally, we have set up a system of procurement and control to regulate the crisis, specially in the interest of the non-producing city-dwellers. There are besides certain deficit areas and seasonal shortages to cope with. They are being covered by imported food material and by drawing upon food supplies from areas where there is a surplus at the time. The biggest factor which has accentuated the problem is the requirement of our non-producing population, particularly of industrial and urban areas. The total oftake for all rationed areas, urban as well as rural, comes to 7 to 8 million tons. This is partially met by internal procurement which comes to about 4 million tons, leaving 3 to 4 million tons to be made up partly by food imports and partly by squeezing the supplies from the unrationed areas.

This, in brief, is the background of our food problem. Before Gandhiji died, he warned us against the trap into which we would run if we pursued the policy of relying for food on outside supplies. The import of food and the ebb and flow of food stocks within the country as basic features of our food economy are, at best, palliatives that serve to mask the symptoms. It is much better, as Gandhiji told us, to let deficit areas appear as deficit, so that we feel the pinch and do not lull ourselves and the people into a false sense of easy-going complacency, than convert artificially the whole country into a deficit area and cover up the dismal fact by begging food from outside. Let the shortage in deficit areas be met by a nationwide austerity programme or even by imports, provided the imports are strictly restricted to deficit areas only. The local surpluses when they arrive can be utilized to build up regional grain reservoir, so as to reduce to the minimum the internal movements of grain. But the balance of the whole country should not be disturbed. Even if this costs us more in money, it does not matter. The extra expense will be worth the contentment and peace it will bring to the people and the stability and staying power it will confer upon us. These are assets whose value cannot be over-estimated whether in peace time or in the eventuality of a war. Probably, in the long run, the cost will not be heavier than what we have to pay in order to maintain a highly paid, extensive and corrupt machinery of control, procurement and movement of food-grains, which has done more than anything else to lower the standard of public morality and bring into disrepute the administration. Let the open sore remain exposed to view. It will serve as a constant reminder and warning.

The administration will then be compelled to tackle the evil at the root and end the crisis in the shortest possible time or have to clear out and make room for a better one. Released from

* This is the third and last of the Gandhi Memorial Lectures delivered by Shri Pyarelal at Kanpur, under the auspices of the Agra University, on 3rd, 4th and 5th December 1951 and published with its kind consent.

the jugglery of experts, we shall breathe freely once more and be ready for a genuine, popular effort.

But what about the uncovered deficit in the meantime? Is it inevitable? The reply is 'no'. I am afraid, we have not learnt or taught our people to utilize our internal food resources and food-producing capacity to the full. Our country is rich in food resources. We have an endless variety of edible herbs, roots and tubers like sweet potato, yams, cassava and tapioca, whole jungles of jack fruit and mango and banana, coconut, palm and cashewnut, and extensive crops of groundnut and gingeli, linseed and other edible oils to mention only a few. And there are simple homely and inexpensive ways of preserving them and using them to provide all the nutrition we need. We have recently started a chain of non-cereal Anna-Purna cafeterias and their extraordinary popularity has surprised everybody. These Anna-Purnas, are however, only urban novelties. The principle is capable of countrywide application. The trouble is, we have neither the men, nor the leadership, nor the machinery to inspire the masses. The government machinery continues to be the white elephant it was. The various political organizations in the country—including the Congress, are more anxious to capture power than generate power by humble service of the people in the way Gandhiji taught us. I dare say, if instead of railing at the administration, we all made up our mind to supplement its efforts, if the various political organizations, instead of engaging in mutual recrimination, spread themselves out in the country to help the people, we should be much nearer the solution of our food problem than we seem today, and the food problem would cease to be the bug-bear it has become. Students can play a great part in this. They can go to the villages equipped with the requisite knowledge which can easily be acquired in a short time. I say this on the strength of experiments I myself made in Noakhali. It showed how little can go how far when it is done in the right way and the right spirit, and how its effect outruns mere arithmetical progression. But I must here resist the temptation to enter into further detail.

I can very well understand the eagerness of those who favour large scale collective farming. The cat was let out of the bag by a friend, who is in the administration, and therefore knows all the ropes, when he remarked the other day: "Large-scale collective farming is the method *par excellence* of making procurement easy and increasing it to capacity. If we have a system of small-scale individual farming on a co-operative basis, procurement will not be so easy; there will be fierce resistance, and we shall find it difficult to meet the growing needs of our industrial areas." Must we continue to subsidize the needs of our "industrial population" by a step-motherly treatment to the country-folk in non-rationed areas?

(To be continued)

PROF. SHAH'S CANDIDATURE

I am glad to share with the reader the gist of a Gujarati letter received by me from Prof. K. T. Shah in respect of his candidature of the Presidency of India. He has reiterated therein in short what he has said more fully in his letter to Shri A. K. Gopalan, when he consented to accept his nomination. As stated therein, he holds, contrary to what I had assumed, that the President of India is not a mere titular head of the Republic. He has some definite powers and there is reason to believe that occasions may arise to make use of them. He also draws my attention to the conditions (or "assumption", as he says), on which he has agreed to contest the election. They are:

"that the contest is to be a matter of asserting a matter of principle and not a case of personal or party wrangling; that those who invite me to contest realize that I am and shall continue to be an entirely non-party individual; that there would be no personal canvassing by myself and that my supporters accepting me as a non-party candidate, would do everything necessary to make the contest fair and free...."

With regard to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, he has made it clear to his sponsors:

"There is a personal reason for hesitation, which I trust you will fully understand and sincerely appreciate. I have the highest regard, personally, and esteem for the present President, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. I regard him as amongst the few honest and sincere Congressmen holding sacred, even today, the high ideals which actuated that organization in the days before it came to power. A man of honesty and learning profound; a statesman with ideals and understanding, he is an individual, I can say from personal knowledge and experience, of rare courage and understanding, of simplicity and dignity which makes him most eminently fit for the highest office in the Union. For my own self, I would never dream of contesting this or any other office, in popular gift, against him. But I have carefully weighed the considerations of long-range constitutional importance you have urged and have long pondered over the position when we are to create new conventions and set new precedents. Personal considerations must, in such cases, outweigh and give place to public principles; and as such I have subordinated my personal feelings in the matter and given this answer only on its merits as a matter of public interest."

I am glad that this seeming competition is thus run in a very sportsmanlike manner, so far as Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Prof. Shah are concerned. I may add that Prof. Shah is under no illusion about the results and has taken this step only in order to establish a principle.

I am aware that there are other candidates also. I must say I do not take them seriously. Their candidature must not be confused with that of Prof. Shah.

I, for one, do not think that it can always be insisted, upon that the President should invariably be a person who has not belonged to any political party before his election. Since a person before being held fit for this office will generally be one advanced in years, he must have led the country for a long time in various fields of national activity, not excluding politics normally as a member of some party or another. And more often than not he will have belonged to the majority party. Since, in a party-governed democracy, the election will necessarily go in favour of the candidate proposed by the governing party, the establishment of a different principle is not likely to succeed through a routine of elections. It can be established only by an agreed convention; that is, for practical purposes, if the majority party consents. If it does not, and the electoral procedure becomes the normal method there is rather the possibility of the

Presidential election being made a subject of joke or of power politics and intrigue.

It will injure the prestige and dignity of the Presidential office. I feel that this possibility could have been avoided if the Congress as the largest and the most responsible party had consulted other party leaders before presenting Rajendra Babu's name. In that case, what the other parties should normally expect is that even if the name proposed is that of a party leader, he is one whose services to the nation are undisputed, who is held in high esteem by the public, and whose capacity to discharge the duties of his office without favour or fear and to act as a man above all parties is recognized.

Wardha, 18-4-52

K. G. MASHRUWALA

SHRI VINOBA'S UTTAR PRADESH TOUR

II

Land-problem in Uttar Pradesh

Let me now say a few words about the land problem in this province. It has its own peculiar features here and is not the same throughout. Its form in the eastern districts differs from that in the western. The holdings in the former are generally very small, even the Zamindari estates are not as big as they usually are in the western part. Fragmentation seems to have continued for long and without interruption. Then the western part enjoys water facilities of tube-wells and irrigation canals which are not available to the latter. Of course, the facilities benefit mostly the large zamindars. To add to the difficulties in the eastern part the rivers Ghoghra and Sharayu wash away large quantities of the rich soil and the land is denuded of its fertility. Then there is the problem of the dwindling food-crop cultivation created by the increase in the cultivation of sugar-cane for sugar-factories. This problem affects the whole province. It has seriously hit the old *gur* and *khandsari* (i.e. hand-made sugar) industries which have practically gone out of existence. Moreover, the cane-cultivation is fast destroying the fertility of the soil and in recent years it has considerably gone down.

The Zamindari Abolition Act of the Congress Government has, contrary to expectations, worsened the condition of the peasants. The big land-lords have partitioned their lands among their relatives, and have converted the remaining land into large 'farms', which is a legal device for circumventing the law. Farms are taking the place of the abolished Zamindaris which is not only *Zamindari* in disguise but worse than it. The owners of the farms get extensive facilities from the Government in the name of Grow More Food campaign. The farms consist of not hundreds but in many cases thousands of acres of land. Tenants who had been cultivating definite pieces of land for years are being evicted. The labourers who work on these farms are in a miserable plight. They grow wheat and other crops with their labour but they have no share in the produce. They are given their wages in money and have to buy their food-grains from the ration-shops. It is a sad irony that the producers of the finest variety of wheat should be compelled to buy whatever the ration shop may offer them at any time. They are in the same position as the bullocks which drag the plough but must live on fodder. Here too, as elsewhere, *Bhoodan Yajna* is the only remedy to this situation.

The Pardah

Uttar Pradesh has also its social problems to solve, and the most exasperating of these as we experienced it is the *pardah*. In Telangana, the women attended the meetings just as freely as men. Here they are conspicuous by their absence or near-absence. When they do come, it is only for beholding 'the Saint' (i.e. Vinoba), other meetings they do not attend at all. At Piwari, they had come once before, which was 30 years ago, to attend a meeting of Gandhiji; now they had come to attend that of Vinoba. But they sat behind the curtains. The curtains were eventually removed when Vinoba reprimanded the people

for this ugly practice and the leading villagers assured him that this would not happen again. In another village the women were willing and even wished to come to the meeting, but they could not for fear of displeasing their elders. And the meeting was being held in the court-yard of their own house! Mahadevibehn could simply not bear it. The report reached Vinoba and they were allowed to come. That evening, Vinoba devoted a good part of his speech to the removal of this silly custom. He spoke with visible vehemence, and I cannot resist reproducing it in part. He referred to his experience at Piwari and said that the women there did not know that they had the right of vote. Going to the polling station and exercising it was out of question. Of the women of our country the Muslim women of Delhi and the Harijan women of Maharashtra seemed to have been the only ones who exercised their right in large numbers. It was a tragedy, Vinoba said, that while the Constitution granted them the right of vote and made them politically equal with men, the hold of this outmoded and reprehensible custom would not let them come out of the four walls of their homes to attend a meeting in their own village. "Most of you are Hindus who generally quote the authority of the *shastras* for resisting reforms. But even the *shastras* insist on the presence of women in every ceremony. Rama had to perform a *yajna*, but could not, because Sita though living was not present. In the end, her earthen image had to be placed by his side to overcome the difficulty of her physical absence. We repeat Sitaram and Radheshyam parrot-like, but keep our women in prison. It has weakened the country. This custom seems to have come from the Muslims. It is not bad to accept good things from others, but a custom which enslaves women and weakens and degrades the country must be abandoned."

They should consider, Vinoba continued, what would happen to the boys and girls whose mothers were kept illiterate and ignorant. Children received more from their mothers than from the schools. The mothers told their children stories from Ramayan and Mahabharat and *bhajans* from poet-saints, and these set the foundation of the children's character for the whole of their life. That was why the scriptures spoke of the mother as the first *guru* of her child. The father and the actual teacher come second and third only.

"We should not forget that God resides as much in woman as in man. There is no difference in them from the point of view of the *atma*. Just look at the galaxy of the great women we had had. The questions which Gargi put to sage Yajnavalkya in the assembly of the seers of the time in King Janaka's court constitute an acme of our Upanishadic literature, and are still read and pondered over. The Upanishad says that her questions were like pointed arrows. How dare we keep women in the *pardah* in the land of Gargi?"

The problem of drink too is there, though not in the virulent form in which we found it in Telangana. The figures of the addicts which we got were truly terrifying. Not only do men drink but also women. *Hukka*-smoking is quite wide-spread. In a certain village it was revealed on enquiry that the number of alcohol-addicts was three times that of the literates. Vinobaji asked them if they valued wine three times more than knowledge. The scriptures had listed drinking as one of the five great sins. He asked them to pledge their word of honour that henceforth they would have nothing to do with drink. And women should help their men in keeping the pledge. A truly devoted wife was accorded the dignified epithet of being a *pattivrata*, which means the guardian of the husband's pledges. Let them deserve it by helping their husbands in the fulfilment of their vows. Formerly, in every home in Northern India, he continued, Tulsi's Ramayan used to be recited every day. It had ceased now. It was a sad loss to life and culture of the people. For with those daily recitations of Ramayan and the love and devotion to Rama as a result of it, the drink-habit would

not get any quarter. Vinoba exhorted the villagers to start Ramayan recitations. The name of Rama had the well-reputed merit of the power to drive away the demons. And drink was no less than a demon.

And so we continued our journey without break according to schedule, despite Vinobaji's inability to walk on account of the injury to his leg. There were occasions when we had to pass through thick forests infested with wild animals. Once we even saw the fresh foot-marks of a tiger which must have passed that way only a little before we arrived.

Often the snowy peaks of the Himalayas would emerge into view and our eyes rest on them lovingly drinking of its peace and purity. Vinoba would look at them fondly and rather wishfully. Could it be that he was thinking of the days long ago when in his teens he set out for these mountains with the intent of doing *tapas*? He had actually come unto Banaras, but thence he returned to meet Gandhiji, the human Himalaya, at Sabarmati.

The True Kshatriya

Today, he is wandering about from village to village, on his self-chosen mission of restoring the poor to their rightful place in society and proving to a sceptical but expectant world the glories of love and *ahimsa*. He is not only explaining to the people the need and justice of equal sharing of wealth but also initiating them into a new and more humanistic religion. He is reinterpreting and renovating the old religious concepts. Speaking of the duty of a *kshatriya*, he said, "We have to lay new norms of the duty of a *kshatriya*. The duty of a *kshatriya* does not consist in making war but in preventing war. Our religion must teach not to kill but to die so that humanity may be saved. *Bhoodan Yajna* is founded on this conception of religion.

Sannyas

Vinoba spoke about *sannyas* (renunciation) at another place. He said that it was one of the greatest words of our language and there was no exact synonym for it in any other language. It demands that a person should, on his son coming of age, entrust the management of the household to him and devote himself to the service of the society. This law was not to be confined to private life; it applied equally in public life. But both in the Congress and the Constructive Institutions, the older generation stuck to their jobs until the young virtually drove them out from their positions. They should renounce their places voluntarily so that the younger generation would have a chance to develop their capacities; the benefit of the experience of the old would be at their disposal when needed, and the country would go ever forward.

Realization of God

Vinoba explained also how they could realize God in life, if they so wished. "Krishna as God is an ever-present reality and we can behold Him, if only we knew the right way of seeing Him. Those who did not cultivate, this might could not recognize Him even when He was present in flesh and blood. Shishupal and Jarasandha did not recognize Him. He is present in our hearts, and there He awaits our recognition of Him. Krishna created in his village, Gokul, the atmosphere of mutual love and co-operation, of the unity of hearts. Let us do that and we shall see Krishna dancing with us. Let us give land to the landless and create love and we shall feel His presence in our midst."

Self-Sufficient Villages

On another occasion, Vinoba said that the chapter of War (i.e., the Canto of the Mahabharat describing the war) was over and we had now entered upon the chapter of Construction (i.e., the Canto of Mahabharat known as *Udyoga*). He said, "Even as the *rishis* sang: *This is whole, That is whole*, we should be able to say, *this village is whole, and that one too is whole*; of course,

he stressed the construction of self-sufficient village-units. The art of life, Vinoba said, consisted in the giving of joys and partaking of the sorrows of those among whom we lived. That was a key to a really happy life.

Propagation of Good Literature

And so we trot on. People give their lands and Vinoba gives them from his abundant learning. In the course of his tour this time, he has been continuously insisting on the need of propagating good literature. He said: "There is an impression around that study and contemplation are things to be pursued exclusively by students and anchorites, and not by the ordinary people. This is a wrong idea, and this attitude is deplorable. A home in which there is no atmosphere of study and of daily contemplation of the highest thought falls in its function and remains the poorer for it." He advises the people to read his books which he says will give them the benefit of good company for ever. "The tree withers away for want of water; it is the same with work. It loses vitality if it is not fed on contemplation and inquiry." The books he recommends most are his sermons on the *Gita* (*Gita Pravachan*) available in both Hindi and Marathi, and the small booklet *Bhoodan Yajna* (Land-Gift-Sacrifice). Speaking about the former he says that *Gita Pravachan* embodied the essence of his life and every Hindi-knowing household must possess a copy of it. Thus about 10,000 copies of the book have been sold. We have also made 250 new subscribers of *Sarvodaya*. The propagation of Sarvodaya literature is an important item of our work.

Centres of Culture

In the course of our journey from Meerut to Sitapur we visited several places of historical and cultural importance. But of these, those, which have now received added importance by associating themselves with *Bhoodan Yajna* are the Meerut Gandhi Ashram, the Haldwani Ashram, the International Centre of Muslim culture at Deoband and some others. With all these institutions our relations have now become more intimate and close. The Ashok Ashram of Kalasi is also one of these centres and I must make particular mention of the remarkable service which Shri Dharmadeo Shastri, the head of this institution and his noble wife are rendering to the hilly tribes of their area. They have done much towards weaning the people away from the drink-habit which is quite rampant there. The readers of *Harijan*, however, are acquainted with Shastri's beneficent work and I would not bother them with details.

I will mention just one more incident. We were in Rishikesh. There on the bank of the Ganga that evening, Vinoba delivered a most penetrating speech on *Brahmavidya* (the Science of the Self, the Supreme Reality). There was a spell of inspiration and we listened to him in silent adoration. Later, that evening the hermits from the monastery of Kali-Kamlivale Maharaj came to see Vinoba. Next morning on our way forward we stopped for a while at their *dharmashala* (rest-house). We were received very lovingly and the Sadhus made a touching gift to Vinoba of a rosary of *rudraksha* beads and a jarful of *Ganga-jal* (the sacred water of the Ganga).

(Abridged from the original in Hindi)

D. M.

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