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A PHILOSOPHY OF DESPAIR*

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I have in mind three kinds of despair : National despair, International despair, and Human despair. Let us first talk about National despair. There has been no revolt in India against any internal regime, however tyrannical, for the last 1500 years. By revolt I mean a movement in which thousands of people are involved. This has led the Indian people to always opt for stability. Not only that it has also killed our desire to take risk—if you do not take risk you cannot bring about revolution—I feel that revolution is almost impossible in our country, because our people are half-fed, half-dead and yet they are satisfied. In other countries of the world wherever there is poverty, there is dissatisfaction. In our country there might be some amount of jealousy but there is no discontent.

One of the main reasons for this state of affairs has been the caste system. This institution of caste is peculiar to our country. Added to it is our slavish mentality. In other countries inequality is maintained by force, and so the people revolt, the moment they feel that they can do it successfully. But in our country, apart from force, caste system helps in maintaining the *status quo*. In Europe you can easily find people who are disgusted with their system. But in one country, it is rare to find such a man. Some people have argued that in India revolution will never take place

* Translated from Hindi

because people have accepted inequality as a way of life. This remoteness of the possibilities of revolution in India is my despair on the national plane.

In this context I may draw your attention to the fact that for every people there are different periods of rise and fall. A period might be marked by a desire to do something, to take risk and to move forward. It might be followed by another period when the primary stress is luxurious consumption. Maybe, for the Indian people the period preceding independence was the period when the people were prepared to take risk. I am not saying that that period was one of revolution and renunciation but it cannot be denied that there was a will to suffer. It was quite natural that with independence Indian people entered into the phase of luxurious consumption and today the entire ruling class of India is engaged in conspicuous consumption. At this stage it might be necessary to define the ruling class of India. In every country there is periodic change of ruling class. Any student of history can easily substantiate this point by giving illustrations from European or even Asian history. But in our country there has been no change of ruling class for the last 1500 years. By ruling class I do not mean only the people who actually ruled but also the people who constitute the power elite. This ruling class of India fought with the foreign invaders but when it was defeated it compromised with them. Thus, there is some sort of a synthesis between the way of life of the Indian ruling class and that of the foreign invaders. It is necessary to stress that the second grade ruling elite of India never changes. The actual ruler might change, for instance Pathans were replaced by Mughals, Mughals by Marathas and Marathas by the British. But this ancestrally slave section of the ruling class has always remained so. Who constitute this section might be difficult to define. Broadly speaking it might be said that all those people whose income is above Rs. 1,000 and who use the feudal language, whether Persian or English, belong to this group. In my assessment around 50 lakhs people belong to this and there has been no change of this class. They compromised with every aggressor and they bowed down before every crisis. Even in revolutionary politics the leadership comes from this section of the population because they alone are in a position to grasp and execute new ideas. They take to new ideas but they always see to it that they perpetuate their hold over the

people. Today the top leadership of all political parties comes from this group. They might get followers or flatterers from other sections of the society but there is no denying the fact that they are in full control of the situation. The real tragedy is that other sections of the people have no will to revolt. It is really a peculiar situation—that those who need revolution have no will or strength for it and those who have strength have no need for it. And that explains my despair on the national plane. Added to this are other factors like today an average Indian is a liar, over much talkative, shirks work and is lazy. I have no doubt that we Indians today are the greatest liars and the laziest lot on earth.

This brings me to my despair on the international plane. Two types of despair is gripping me on the international plane: (i) armament and war and (ii) machine. Today the white people are the rulers of the world. They have all kinds of machines and that explains the phenomenal growth of their economy. They are not more intelligent except in inventing new machines. Their system is like that in which about 50 thousand boys and girls take up training in science, engineering and research. Later on when they go into jobs they are asked to find out ways for maximizing production and minimizing cost of production. They do not produce anything except concentrating on research. Some people have the feeling that if the economies of white people continue to develop at this phenomenal rate the time is not distant when there will be no need for buying and selling things. This is a brighter aspect of the situation. But what despairs me is that increase in production kills diversity of life. There is always some ray of uniformity in music, dance, dresses and even faces of people. It is this uniformity which leads to monotony in the white world. At first sight there is no doubt that white people are good in look at, particularly their women. When you look at the face of a white woman you might be infatuated and you might even feel that you are having a sort of dream. But if you continue to see them you might feel disgusted because in the process of becoming sweeter they are losing the saltiness of their personality. A French scholar has come to the conclusion that we cannot save the world because it is going to be engulfed by the widespread feeling of meaninglessness.

Without going into the details of armament I simply say that today mankind is spending Rs. 8,000 crores on armaments. There

is another aspect of the problem. Before 1945 weapons were decisive for victory or defeat though then was a lot of condemnation on moral ground. But today weapons are not only bad from the viewpoint of morality but they are becoming useless and redundant because they do not lead either to victory or to defeat. I wonder how long man will continue collecting the redundant weapon. That is why I feel that in coming 21 years either mankind will do away with weapon or the weapons will exterminate mankind I have painted both the bright and the dark aspects of the situation. But if you stretch the argument, you will easily realise that what I have said about nuclear weapon is equally applicable to conventional weapons. For a moment let us assume that both the USA and the USSR decide to do away with nuclear weapons but nuclear expertise remains with them and so at any moment they can decide to resume production of nuclear weapons. That is why, to my mind, it is high time that mankind do away with conventional weapons too. But now? We are not living in a world where there is no need of guns. In Europe the police is given a very small stick and not the 'lathi' used by police in India.

One actually reaches at one's wit's end and when one thinks of ways and means of total disarmament. Will mankind ever usher in an era when there is no treachery or anger? I doubt. But this is not the main reason, because 99 per cent of the population can be brought about to a situation where there is no need of weapons.

If a society upto reaches the stage of possible equality, if not total equality, a stage might be reached for doing away with the weapons. If you look at the world everywhere there is a fight against inequality and that makes me hopeful. Perhaps this fight against injustice and inequality is the chief characteristic of 20th century. At least on theoretical plane it seems quite possible that by the turn of the century mankind will reach the stage where there will be no injustice, no inequality. This is the brighter aspect of the situation. But, I am doubtful whether mankind will win on both fronts simultaneously.

The 20th century is a century in the history of mankind devoid of the milk of human kindness. But it has a brighter aspect i.e., man is fighting against every kind of injustice. If man succeeds in this fight, by the turn of century he can reach a stage

when the world will be without injustice. But at the moment this can be thought of only on a theoretical plane.

THE FIVE IMPERIALISMS

Besides armament, there are other type of injustices in the world. Some of them are : Lebensraum imperialism, or international landlordism, is the first of the unapprehended criminals. Countries like the United States and Soviet Russia have enormous space with little density of population. Accidents of history alone have gifted these enormous land masses. Cruel barbarism has incidentally been a contributory factor to such accidents. Siberia and Australia are peopled at one person to the square mile. Canada is not much different California is well under ten persons to the square mile. We may contrast these with the densities of 350 persons to the square mile in India and nearly 200 in China. If landlordism within a country can be so unsavoury to the progressive, as it out to be, what of this international landlordism ? Some day, somebody or perhaps the whole of mankind will have to set right these unjust turns of history.

Mind—imperialism is as much a mark of our times as any other. It is true that there is a willingness on the part of the intellectual imperialist to impart his learning though not necessarily all the skills or the situation of elemental awakening, to the colonials of the mind. It may be pointed out that a similar mind-imperialism exists internally in India. Certain castes have become mind-imperialists through long tradition. One might say that several thousand years of division of labour by birth have been acting almost like a natural selection. On the world stage, this has been going on for about 400 years. The white mind-imperialist would be just as wrong as the coloured high-caste, native mind-imperialist. If we were to deny all responsibility for this situation and content himself with the nostrum of equal opportunity. Equality of opportunity can only continue and deepen the injustice of mind-imperialism. Only through unequal and privileged opportunities to colonials of the mind can mind-imperialism be abolished.

A third such hidden tyranny is productivity-imperialism. Everyone knows that Russia and America with roughly one-eighth

of the world's population produce more than half of its wealth. The landless labourer in India earns eight annas or ten American cents a day, while his opposite number in the US earns about Rs. 25 or five American dollars a day. Russia and America produce wealth worth between Rs. 8,000 and Rs. 14,000 per person per year, while India has to be content with a paltry sum of Rs. 400 per person per year. Russia and America are growing each year at the rate of Rs. 250 per person per year, while the corresponding amount in India is just Rs. 5. The idea is not to apportion blame, at least not in the present. The basis for this productivity-imperialism may be traced to ancient exploration. If there is exploration today, it is more or less with the willing consent of those exploited. No imputation of blame or any other kind of accusation must be read into this. The situation has to be recognised. If we the human race are to be one, this situation must be deeply understood and remedied.

Weapons-imperialism is a necessary corollary of the previous imperialism of perhaps their source, and it is not so hidden. Russia and America have often agreed in their drafts on the need to keep the knowledge and the reality of nuclear weaponry to themselves. Some of the progressive Americans and Russians would be shocked if they were told that this amounts to weapons-imperialism of the white against the coloured. The coloured people have indeed no right to fret or fume. They are more than willing to stockpile any old conventional weapons while the pay worshipful homage to the unilateralist disamer in Euro-America. Such is the split mind of the coloured man. Once again it is not a question of blame or accusation, but of simple recognition of a situation in which one part of mankind possesses almost the ultimate in weapons.

Price-loot-imperialism is the fifth one in this category with which I shall stop the present enumeration. Price movement and the terms of trade are almost always unfavourable to agriculture and producer of raw materials. If the prices of manufactures have gone up by a hundred per cent in the last ten years, primary produce has increased just by 74 per cent. Robbery on this score alone must be running into billions every year. I dare say that there is a similar internal price-loot in the relationship between man factures and primary produce. But that aggravated to a very large extent by presence of indirect taxation. One hearts

most every day of foreign aid and the philanthropic motives involved in it. The taker of gifts must indeed be contrite and humble at least until the taker has learned not to misuse gifts and both he and the giver have become aware of the world situation as a whole. However, one never hears of the price-list inherent in every item of international trade between the white and the coloured.

Against each of these imperialisms, India and China and all the other coloured people should have been able to act with firmness as in unison. They should, of course, have made every effort to include such white peoples in their ranks and, in fact, invite to leaderships those willing to recognise the world situation. But none of this was to happen. I had sometimes day dreamed in my earlier years the China and India and the just-minded which would be able some day to knock at the door of Australia, Siberia and California and have them opened. But, the knocking has taken place elsewhere. Bursting with some kind of power, one knows not which, China has sought the easy way out. She has knocked at the Himalayas. Not to talk of Australia, she did not even knock at Hong Kong or Macao. She did not have strength enough in her knuckle even for measly enterprises. She has chosen knock where she thought her strength sufficed.

I am compelled to believe that this she ever remain a tragedy of the human race. Enthroned man will work not for the remove of injustice but for the attainment of aims that lie within his reach. The reach of the coloured man must necessarily remain small, even wicked for a long time yet. Not much can, therefore, be expected of the coloured man that sits on throne. Deliverance must come, if it ever will from the white man. He has infinitely greater power and potentially greater intelligence, however he sees the world situation as a whole, may do something about it. Coloured peoples are indeed not out of the arena altogether. Such of them whome little packets of power do not corrupt may take a wider view and the more risky initiative. I must, however, add an item to the theory of the struggle between the white and coloured peoples. This struggle will be overcome, if at all, by the intelligence of the white as much as by the self-interest and radicalism of the coloured.

Now let me come to the human despair to which I referred in the beginning. It appears that for any social organization

the first attempt is to build it up and the moment it gathers strength it starts losing its idealism. This is true of any organisation including that of Satyagraha. The Socialist Party has been leading Satyagraha movements though not always successfully and effectively. I feel that to build up the Satyagraha movement we must start making our party strong. Sometimes I have the feeling that so long as the SSP is weak it is easy for us to make our members fight against injustice, but the moment it will gather strength the attention of its members will be more concentrated on capturing the government machine of the State. If the people who capture state power are idealists determined to do something for the people I welcome it. Let us assume for the moment that SSP becomes old and flabby. Naturally it will start thinking only in terms of capturing power. It is the inexorable law of history that fighters against injustice ultimately end up as maintainers of *status quo*. This can be illustrated even by the Congress Party. That is why I feel that even our Party cannot avoid it and instead of launching struggles and movements it will be more bothered about capturing power and subsequently retaining it. More particularly when the number of legislators will increase and there will be thousand and one ways of distributing favours. We have not succeeded in terms of capturing state power; and, as I have said we may not succeed even after capturing power to maintain our idealism. Then defeat becomes our lot. Let me frankly tell you that I do not know the way out. But I may say that the historical forces will always work for the replacement of the rotten organisation by one which is new, energetic and idealistic. So let us not despair.

Sometimes I feel that if a number of people start thinking on the lines I have suggested and diagnose the crisis then this philosophy of despair can be turned into a philosophy of optimism and hopefulness. May be, I am saying this only to forget the hard facts of human existence. Therefore, some time back I said that there are two elements in the SSP, political leadership and messianism. May be that we committed a mistake by attempting to balance the two. It also may be true that in our party the messianic element has been predominant. But if you go into the depth of the problem, history is a witness to the fact that men who have changed the world have been more of a messiah than a politician. Mohammad was the only leader who successfully

played the role of both a politician and a messiah. To my mind Mahatma Gandhi was more of a politician than a messiah.

Recently our Prime Minister said that whereas the equality of a leader lies in compromising, a prophet marches forward with his idealism without making compromises. He said that Gandhi was both a politician and a prophet. He also said that any country going in for unilateral disarmament will not be defeated by any power but the real problem was who could lead this movement. Gandhi alone could have done it. This is to indulge in double-talk. On the one hand, you say that unilateral disarmament is good and on the other hand you cancel it out by pointing out its impossibility. This is childish prattle. The real problem is not whether non-violence is meant for the weak or strong. In India at least the weak has resorted to non-violence. Now scholars are saying that Gandhi has no relevance for the future because Gandhi alone was capable of leading such a movement. To my mind it is a trick which is being played on the Indian people.

The task which I have outlined is gigantic. The Socialist Party has taken it up. We must remember that we are not going to get power soon. If we play our role correctly and we are able to find the correct path, it will be historic achievement.

So far I have been talking only about despair. Now I will talk about the Youth Movement in India, since this camp has been organised by the SYS. We must give serious thought as to why we have failed to achieve substantial progress in the last 15 years.

One reason for this failure has been the trick played by the Congress government on Indian Youth. In the name of cultural activities this government has tried to divert the attention of the Indian Youth from the real problems of the country. We must also ask why students agitate for getting a ticket in the cinema hall, but not for the "Banish English Programme".

We must launch massive movement against English. Organize propaganda against English for six months and then you can force teachers not to teach in English. This can be done everywhere. But in non-Hindi areas the fight should be for replacement of English by the regional languages and not by Hindi. We can also organise our students for the security of our frontiers. Thirdly, Foreign Aid is eating into the vitals our country and it helps only the ruling class of India to increase its standard of living. If foreign aid is stopped, the building which is based on a foundation of

sand will start collapsing.

On the religious front we must take the help of Hindu scriptures insofar as they are anti-caste as was done by Dayanand. But this is a minor aspect of the situation. On the economic front it is the people of backward caste who own land holdings less than 6½ acres and hence the land revenue must go. On social front we must organise community kitchen. Secondly, we must go in for inter-caste marriages. The people who go in for inter-caste marriages should be given preference in the services. Our political fight against caste system must be directed with a view retaining general franchise. Along with adult franchise we must also fight for preferential revolution. In India, revolution for equality will mean the maintenance of privileges of the ruling class. This is primarily due to caste system. Thus, we must destroy caste system by all-out attack. Only the Socialist Party has understood this nature of Indian society.

We must fight against the demon of caste system on all fronts—religious, economic, social and political. Here sometimes it is argued that students should not be used for political purposes. Let me say that I have never used the students. I thought that both students and workers were useless. But now I feel at least from the viewpoint of cities we must bring students and workers to our fold I want to use both these groups for radicalising Indian politics. I want that the Socialist Party should use them for this purpose.

Sometimes you say that you have been launching various movements, but I tell you that these are not called effective movement. In Japan over a lakh of students agitated for more than 20 days and thus they succeeded in getting the American President visit cancelled. You take out only ten or 20 people and call it a movement.

Most of the students use their leadership for getting good jobs after they come out of the college. Your organization has been leading movements based on idealism. You often say that you face difficulties. There is only one answer : if you work hard you will face less difficulties. Secondly, a revolutionary movement everywhere entails difficulties and sacrifices. Work hard and undergo suffering in order to revolutionise Indian politics.