

Monthly Organ of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi Sansthakul

Non-co-operation, Resistance and Non-Violence **Acharya Vinoba**

Non-co-operation and resistance are two stages of one and the same thing. As compared with the former, the latter is more drastic. Where it is possible by non-co-operation to accomplish what is desired, resistance should not be resorted to. In non-co-operation, the hand of co-operation is withdrawn and an opportunity is given to the opponent for remedying the situation. Only when it is clear that this much is not enough it becomes necessary to break the law of the State. In so doing one must act (1) civilly, i.e., within the specified limits one has set for oneself, (2) in an orderly manner, i.e., not allowing any breach of discipline anywhere, (3) openly, i.e., not hiding anything and without pretence or deceit, (4) firmly, i.e., putting forward one's minimum demand in regard to the matter in dispute and not giving in till it is met. Whatever punishment is given for such violation of law should be borne gladly and without any feeling of hatred. Training of this kind should enter into the very life of the people and for this purpose it should find a permanent place in education and in the ethical codes of the nation.

❖ ***The permanent place of non-co-operation in social life.***

Thought in a good State non-co-operation and resistance are occasional and depend on time and circumstance, they occupy a permanent place in social life. For they are required not only in the political field but also more or less constantly in social relationships, family affairs and in dealings between one individual and another. Between the two extremes of bearing injustice passively without resistance, and resisting violently in a fit of passion forgetful of all caution (or even in a cold calculating matter) lies the noble middle way of nonviolent, non-co-operation and resistance. Whatever nature of the state, the attitude of mind and the strength required for resorting to this method where necessary, should be kept alive through the ethical codes of society.

❖ ***The direction along which education in Non-co-operation should proceed, distinction between rules and principles.***

For this purpose, from childhood children should be taught exceptions to general rules. For instance, side by side with the teaching that children should humbly carry out the orders of their parents, the parents themselves should teach their children that if their orders do not appeal to the children's conscience, the children should respectfully break the orders. Public opinion in regard to other broad rules

also should be of this nature. Manu said that wise men always respect principles, i.e., the eternal moral principles of truth, non-violence and such like, but that no one is expected to respect rules also thus invariably. What Manu meant was that rules relating to the family, society or the nation, whatever their nature, should undoubtedly be obeyed so long as they do not conflict with principles, but when they do thus conflict they should be abandoned respectfully.

In a good social order, rules are of such a nature as not to be contrary to eternal principles. But the nature of a machine in operation is such that there is always the possibility of friction arising in it to a greater or less extent. So it is never the case that once an ideal State has been established, it can be trusted of itself to look after the people and give them happiness while the people themselves comfortably fall asleep or go about with their eyes shut. Even if such a State were for purposes of argument assumed to be possible, there can be no development of the individual under it. Therefore it is that by the grace of God such a State cannot be established.

Briefly, then, it should be regarded as an essential characteristic of a good State that the people are sufficiently alert, or are kept alert, to be able to practise, as required by circumstance, co-operation, non-co-operation and resistance, entirely non-violently, and keeping in mind the limitations of these modes of action.

❖ ***Successful application of non-violence in history: illustration from India.***
Solving the problems of a country like India with its many communities, religions and languages, its vast population and immense area is almost like solving the problems of the whole world. Those who regarded so huge a country as one at a time when modern means of communication were not yet invented must have done so only because they learnt from endless quarrels that the solution lay in the important principle of organizing the many warring elements into one nation. The secret that comes to view in this is that a huge country such as ours can not hold together as one except through non-violence, and it is because of this that by far the highest place has been given in the ethics of India to non-violence in the field of politics, social life, family affairs, economics and education.

As a result, the common people of India had given up for long all faith in arms, and had begun to think of India as one nation, or as Rabindranath Tagore called it as an 'ocean of humanity' and therefore as requiring to be kept open for all. But in spite of non-violence being kept before the minds of people thus as a mode of action, it must be admitted that there are very few cases where non-

violence was practiced on any extensive scale in the realm of Politics. From a history of the communities living in India it is clear that India had put this principle in practice to a very large extent in the sphere of social, family and individual life. In social life for instance owing to the practice of nonviolence, all races coming into the country from outside became part of the nation itself.

❖ *Non-violence at the sole basis for the masses, good men and elders coming together.*

But why was non-violence not applied in the political field? Chiefly because Politics as such did not occupy an important place in India. Today of course Politics touches every aspect of life, so that good men, elders and ordinary men cannot afford, i.e., no one can afford to be indifferent to it.

If the masses depending on their own strength were to occupy themselves with Politics which today has become co-extensive with life, they cannot do so without the practice of non-violence, for violence depending as it does on armaments and training given by the few does not constitute the strength of the people taken by themselves, Similarly if good men were to take part in the all pervasive affairs of the State, they also cannot do so without non-violence, for violence is not a part of their nature. And if the elders were to take part.

The Dangers of Narrow Nationalism

Jawaharlal Nehru

The feeling of nationalism is an enlarging and widening experience for the individual or the nation. More especially, when a country is under foreign domination, nationalism is a strengthening and unifying force. But, a stage arrives when it might well have a narrowing influence. Sometimes, as in Europe, it becomes aggressive and chauvinistic and wants to impose itself on other countries and other people. Every people suffer from the strange delusion that they are the elect and better than all others. When they become strong and powerful, they try to impose themselves and their ways on others. In their attempt to do so, sometime or other, they overreach themselves, stumble and fall. That has been the fate of the intense nationalism of Germany and Japan.

But a more insidious form of nationalism is the narrowness of mind that it develops within a country, when a majority thinks itself as the entire nation and in its attempt to absorb the minority actually separates them even more. We, in India, have to be particularly careful of this because of our tradition of caste and separatism. We have a in such far-reaching political life (and it would seem that for such men this is nothing new although as a matter of fact it is, for till now political affairs in which they engaged themselves were never co-extensive with life) there is no way of their doing so except through resorting to non-violence. For though the disposition and capacity for violence may be present in them, there is no scope

for violence in a political administration which is as wide as life. Therefore non-violence provides the only safe basis for a political code such as will bring ordinary men, good men and elders together.

(Swaraj Sastra: Page 53-58)

tendency to fall into separate groups and to forget the larger unity.

Communal organizations are the clearest examples of extreme narrowness of outlook, strutting about in the guise of nationalism. In the name of unity, they separate and destroy. In social terms they represent reaction of the worst type. We may condemn these communal organizations, but there are many others who are not free from this narrow influence. Oddly enough, the very largeness of India, which is a world in itself, tends to make the people living in it complacent, rather ignorant of the rest of the world, and narrowminded. We have to contend against these forces...

There is a tendency among some of us to demand loyalty from the Muslims in India.... But I think it is wrong to lay stress always on the loyalty on behalf of the Muslims of India. Loyalty is not produced to order or by fear. It comes as a natural growth from circumstances which make loyalty not only a sentiment which appeals to one but also profitable in the long run. We have to produce conditions which lead to this sentiment being produced. In an event, criticism and caviling at minorities does not help.

It is difficult to think of long-term policies when the situation is an ever-changing one. The only real long-term policy we can have is to consolidate India by making all the minorities in the country feel completely at home in the State, and indeed by removing all sense of difference from the political point of view between the so-called majorities and minorities. That will, no doubt take some time. But that is the only goal to aim at and every step taken must keep that in view.

(All Excerpts from Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru)

Coronavirus Is the Voice of the Earth

Satish Kumar

The year 2020 will be remembered as the year of COVID-19. The year of social distancing, lock downs and staying indoors even when the sun was shining, flowers were flourishing, and birds were singing their sweet songs in the spring. I was in the fortunate position to be able to take that time of self-isolation as a blessing, a time for spiritual retreat and a time for reflection. I read Rumi and Hafiz, I read Shakespeare's Sonnets. I read Rabindranath Tagore. I thought of the word, quarantine, with its association with Lent, I learned that originally the word was referred to the period of forty days which Jesus Christ spent fasting in the desert. So, for me this time of quarantine became a time of inner solitude.

However, I was fully mindful of the effect of the virus across the world and was sad to see so much suffering. Most of humanity was engulfed in an unprecedented crisis. I am 84 and I have never experienced such a drastic and deadly situation in my entire life.

Being in this COVID-19 crisis is worse than being in a state of war. Wars are initiated by humans and can be controlled or ended by humans. But Coronavirus is a show of nature's power and beyond human control. Many people believe that through science and technology we can conquer nature. But through Coronavirus nature was speaking to us loud and clear that the talk of conquering nature is sheer human arrogance. COVID-19 has reminded us in no uncertain terms about the reality of human vulnerability.

Human desire to conquer nature comes from the belief that humans are separate from nature and have superior powers. This dualistic thinking is at the root of our inability to deal with many of the natural upheavals, such as forest fires, floods and in particular climate change, global heating and pandemics like COVID-19. We seem to believe that one way or another we will find technological solutions to subjugate nature and make her subservient to human dominance.

Rather than looking at the root causes of Coronavirus, governments, industrialists and scientists are looking for vaccines to avoid the disease. Vaccines maybe a temporary solution but we need to think and act more intelligently and more wisely. Rather than vaccinating against the disease we need to address the causes of the disease.

Laura Spinney, a science writer asks, in the Guardian of the 26th of March, "Why the emergence of human infections of animal origin have accelerated in recent decades?" And answering her own question she says that, "The forces putting those viruses in our path are political and economic. They have to do with the rise of industrial-scale farming and the resulting marginalisation of millions of small holder farmers. They have been forced closer to uncultivable zones such as forests, where bats - reservoirs for coronavirus - lurk".

If we are to address the causes of coronavirus, we will need to return to ecologically regenerative agriculture; to human-scale, local, low carbon and organic methods of farming. Food is not a commodity. Farming should not be motivated by financial profits. The purpose of farming is to feed people with healthy food. Money is only a means to an end. The end goal of agriculture is to produce nutritious food without depleting the health of the soil, farming for profit, or for making money directly or indirectly causes Coronavirus!

In order to address the causes of COVID- 19, we need to learn to live in harmony with nature and within the laws of nature. Humans are as much a part of nature as any other form of life. Therefore, living in harmony with nature is the

very first lesson we, humans, collectively, need to learn from this crisis. It is an urgent imperative of our time.

The second lesson is that all human actions have consequences. In the past hundred years human activities have been the cause of diminishing biodiversity, increasing carbon emissions and producing greenhouse gases which is causing climate change. Due to human activities the oceans are polluted by plastic, the soil is poisoned with artificial chemicals and the rainforest are disappearing at an unprecedented speed. All these negative human activities are bound to result in some disastrous consequences. Such as tsunamis, floods, forest fires and now Coronavirus in the short term and global warming or climate change in the long term.

Through the Coronavirus crisis, nature is sending a strong message, it is a wakeup call, a reminder that we cannot go on producing pollution and waste thinking that there are no consequences of our activities. Now we know that there is the force of *karma* and in this case, it is named Coronavirus.

Modern civilisations have inflicted untold suffering and damage on nature. Now we are harvesting the consequences. We have to change. We have to move on to build a new paradigm. In order to restore health to people, we must restore health to our precious planet Earth. Healing people and healing nature is one and the same. We need to do everything we can to heal the Earth. Only positive actions can bring about positive outcomes. This is the law of '*Karma*'.

The trinity of Market, Money and Materialism has ruled the modern mind for far too long. Now is the time when we need to slow down and with humility listen to the voice of nature, the voice of the Earth. We need to replace this old trinity with a new trinity, the trinity of Soil, Soul and Society.

Nature is kind and generous, benign and caring. In nature everything passes. So, humanity needs to respond to this crisis positively and use it as an opportunity to redesign our agriculture, our economy, our political systems and our way of life. We need to learn to respect the wilderness. We need to learn to celebrate the abundant beauty and diversity of life. We need to realise that humans are an integral part of nature. So, what we do to nature we do to ourselves. We are totally connected and interconnected with Nature. Coronavirus has shown us that we are interrelated. We depend on each other. We are members of one Earth community and one Earth family.

If this understanding, this world view, becomes an integral part of our consciousness and an organising principle of the mainstream society then we will have different priorities and different values. Instead of economic growth at all costs we will pursue the growth in wellbeing of people and the health of planet earth.

Going back to business as usual, after COVID-19, should not be an option. Before this pandemic society was gripped by the pandemic of greed-virus. And due to greed forests have died, lakes and rivers have died, species have died, children have died, the poor have died, war victims have died, refugees have died. Death and destruction have been the consequence of the greed-virus.

Poet and novelist Ben Okri wrote, in the Guardian of the 27th of March, “The real tragedy would be if we came through this pandemic without changing for the better. It would be as if all those deaths, all that suffering would mean nothing”.

A crisis is an opportunity. In the evolutionary process of nature there have been many crises. Life has evolved through struggle over a long period of geological time. Who knows, maybe this painful pandemic can give birth to a new consciousness, a consciousness of the unity of life, a consciousness of caring and sharing, a consciousness of love.

We have already seen some wonderful signs of this new consciousness. Doctors, nurses and carers have put themselves in harm’s way. They have given their lives to serve the victims of the virus. They are shining examples of selfless service. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary people have volunteered to support the National Health Service. And countless number of helpers in local communities have been caring for the old and the sick. Even the British Government suspended all fiscal rules to help individuals, communities, charities and businesses. There has been an outpouring of solidarity, generosity, mutuality and reciprocity. People have experienced a sense of deep belonging, profound gratitude and unconditional love from many directions.

Simultaneously Russians sent planeloads of medical equipment to Italy. Chinese were doing the same for Serbia. Animosity has been forgotten. Nations have been co-operating, helping and supporting each other, in the spirit of mutual aid, rather than the usual competing and fighting.

If these spiritual qualities could be practiced in abnormal times, then why not in normal times? If we cooperate and collaborate, love and respect in normal times the abnormal conditions are less likely to occur.

In addition to this outpouring of the human spirit we have also seen a reduction of pollution and a partial recovery of the natural environment. Dolphins have been spotted in the canals of Venice and clear blue sky has been experienced over the cities of Bombay and Beijing. Carbon emissions have gone down, people are able to breathe pure air again. If we can have a good environment in abnormal times why not in normal times?

Can we dare to hope that individuals, communities and countries will learn to love each other, look after their environment and create a new world order after this dreadful COVID-19 Crisis has passed? As the Indian novelist Arundhati Roy says, “Historically pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine

their world anew. COVID-19 is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next”.

The lockdown in so many countries, large and small has shown that governments, businesses and ordinary people can come together and take a big economic risk in the interest of greater good, in this case the health of the whole society.

This experience should give us the confidence and courage to take bold actions to safeguard the health of nature and the biosphere. We must remember that we are sitting on the branch of nature. If we cut the branch upon which we are sitting, we are bound to fall. Therefore post COVID-19, let us act together to care for the planet and for the people.

**To the subscribers, readers and all other members of
Sansthakul family**

Due to Corona lockdown, Department of Posts has stopped sending magazines and journals. With no options available, we had to send last joint issue of *Sansthakul* by Book Post, which turned out quite expensive. Now, we'll be able to send *Sansthakul* only by internet, till ordinary postal services are restored. Sorry for the inconvenience. **- Publisher**

Shanti Sena : Building Peace from Below

Dr. N. Markandan

Acharya Vinoba Bhave thought about *Shanti Sena* - Peace Army when he was in Kerala during his Land-Gift Movement Yatra (Bhoodan Yatra), He wanted that villages after achieving the goal of *Gram Swaraj* should be protected and free from the violent activities of any kind. Gandhiji said that non-violent social order could be built only on the self-contained villages, but, not on a factory civilization. So, peace army or peace brigade units in the villages were considered quite essential by Vinobji. At present there is also an urgent need to organize *Shanti Sena* from the village level to the national and international levels.

Causes for Violent Activities at Present

We must make an objective and honest attempt to find out the causes for wide spread violence in the present day world. Grabbing of political power and amassing wealth by any means, fanaticism in the name of caste-religion-race-region and language, dacoity and robbery, sexual aberrations, frustration due to unemployment and economic backwardness are the causes for violent and terrorist activities of today's world. Lack of understanding on the part of the individuals that the essence of all religions is “Love All and Serve All” may also be one of the reasons for resorting to violent activities. How are we going to overcome ourselves

from the above given evil things? Simply thinking and planning at the macro level could not put an end to the above said violent activities. We have to build peace from the micro level to the national and international levels. As Gandhiji rightly said “The greatest ability of the humans is not to change the world but to change ourselves”. Those who want to build peace and harmony in the society must be ready to lead their lives without selfishness and egotism. Ultimately they must be ready to sacrifice their lives for building peace in the society.

Identifying the Right and Suitable Young Men and Women

Among the students of higher education institutions and other educated young men and women, those who are having good health, excellent conduct and character and above all having faith in observing Gandhiji’s principles of Satya (Truth) and Non-violence and a passion to serve for the promotion of peace and harmony in the campuses of the institutions and in the rural and urban areas must be identified to undergo training to become peace brigades. Individuals thus identified must also be free from narrow minded caste-religious and racial fanaticism having an international outlook with the feeling of human brotherhood.

Training to the Peace Brigades or the *Shanli Sainiks*

At least a 3 months certificate course may be very useful to make the well-informed, educated young men and women aware of the present day pressing issues and problems at the local, national and international levels. A thorough understanding of the lives and messages of the great spiritual personalities including the life and message of Mahatma Gandhi is quite essential. It is also essential to master some trades such as doing organic farming, running of a spinning cottage industry utilizing electric power or solar energy, raising and maintaining herbal gardens, electric wiring and repairing of the modem machines which are being used for domestic purposes. Training in the above said trades may be helpful for the peace brigades to become self-employed.

Organizational Structure of the Peace Brigade Units and Service to be rendered

Each village should have a small peace brigade unit. In course of time number of members of the unit maybe increased. The members of this unit must have a close individual contact with the villagers. Apart from engaging in some work for their livelihood, they have to help the village community also for its all-round development in all possible ways. Some of the members of the unit may impart value education to the children in the evenings after their school hours. Some can mobilize the youths - young men and women - to do the cleaning work to keep their village and its surroundings neat and clean. The peace brigades must also join

them in doing his kind of work. Even they can help the villagers to develop skills in different trades to earn for their livelihood. Moving with the people in doing things in such ways may help them to get a good recognition among the people. This will be very helpful to move with the different groups which are not in good terms and to bring peace during the time of clashes between one group and the other. Ultimately, the peace brigade unit will help for the prevalence of peace and harmony in the village community. Peace brigade units at the panchayat level may be organized by way of selecting one or two peace brigades from each one of the hamlets. In the same way the district level units may be organized by way of selecting one or two from each one of the panchayats. ...The Gandhian institutions should take up the responsibility of organizing the peace brigade units at all levels.

Except, during the time of unrest and group clashes in the villages or in the rural and urban areas the peace brigades (*Shanti Sainiks*) should engage in their own possible ways in different Gandhian constructive programs as stated above. The peace 8 brigades should engage in educating the so called upper caste people to give up their attitude of considering the scheduled caste people inferior to them and helping the young men and women to learn some trades to become self-employed. Engaging themselves in implementing the above said programs will go a long way in helping the *Shanti Sainiks* to prevent people from resorting to violent activities and bring together the clashing groups and avoid the violent activities in the villages. The *Shanti Sainiks* in the villages and in the urban areas may identify some service minded willing young and middle aged men and discuss with them about the night patrolling of the village. If a team of such individuals spend at least one night in a week in patrolling the village joining together in two or three among them, the other members may also follow the same pattern for night patrolling of the village. In this way the members of the *Shanti Sainiks* can do the night patrolling in rotation throughout the week. This will help to prevent entering of the miscreants into the village to involve any untoward activities such as harassing the young women, attacking individuals who are not in terms I with them and engaging in dacoity and robbery. It is also a fact that entering of the members of the terrorist groups into the village may be checked to avoid the young men to engage in terrorist activities.

It is quite essential to conduct weekly inter-religious prayer as it is conducted in the Gandhian Ashrams. Apart from allocating a few minutes for meditation, reading passages from Bhagavad-Gita, Bible, Quran and other religious scriptures to broaden the outlook of the people in the village community and make them understand that secularism means tolerance and respect to other religions. The heads of various religious groups may also be requested to explain the life and message of the apostles of concerned religions at the end of the prayer

session. Physical exercise is also quite essential to keep the body of the *Shanti Sainiks* strong and healthy. Just like the inter-religious prayer, once in a week the joint marching with the beating of drums is also necessary to make them physically strong and keep them ready to face the activities of the violent groups. In the above said pattern, the service of the unit of *Shanti Sainiks* of that village will set an example to the units of the other villages and the suburbs of the towns and cities.

State - National - International Level Units

At the state level and the national level also the peace brigade units can be organized by way of selecting one or two members from the units of the districts to the state unit and one or two members from the state units to the national level unit. The president of all India Gandhi Smarak Nidhi may very well guide and lead the national level shanti sena unit. Sometimes if he feels it is necessary he may propose a suitable person for this purpose. It is also possible for a few selected members of the national level *Shanti Sena* unit to visit other nations to spread the message of the importance of *Shanti Sena* and make the devoted and dedicated service-minded peace loving individuals of those nations organize *Shanti Sena* units at different levels in their own countries. The national level leaders of *Shanti Sena* organization in India may raise funds for visiting abroad to carry out the above said program at the international level by way of requesting our national government and the Indian philanthropists to make their contribution.

The above said concept and the structure of *Shanti Sena* may sound a little utopian. After all, every idea when it is said before putting it into practice may sound utopian. But, when it is put into practice even in a small way it will yield good results to some extent. It may be helpful for the promotion of peaceful and harmonious life of the human community from the grassroots to the international levels. Mahatma Gandhi and Acharya Vinoba Bhave succeeded largely in India in improving the socio-political and economic conditions during their lifetime by way of adopting this non-violent method of action. Gandhiji brought peace after walking through the length and breadth of Noakhali and moving with the clashing groups of people. Even an army could not put an end to such violent activities in those days. That was why Lord Mountbatten said that Mahatma put an end to the violent activities as one-man boundary force army adopting his non-violent methods. If the *Shanti Sena* groups at different levels including at the international level are able to create an awareness among the people at all levels including the right minded leaderships of the present day world it may be possible to bring peace and harmony to a great extent at all levels of the society in the near future or within a short period of time.

(Dr. N. Markandan is the former Vice-Chancellor, Gandhigram Rural Institute - Deemed University.)

Condolences

Smt Kamla Radhakrishna Passes Away

Well-known Sarvodaya worker and wife of Shri Radhakrishna, former Secretary of Sarv Seva Sangh and Gandhi Peace Foundation, passed away in Delhi on 28th June 2020. She was 87 and was living with her daughter Shobhana Radhakrishna. She led an active life of social work and piety. Besides age-related complications, she suffered with corona pandemic also. Because of the prevailing circumstances, we were deprived of her last *darshan* and could not take part in her funeral rites.

On behalf of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi fraternity, we pay our tributes to the departed soul, and express our deep condolences to the bereaved family. - **Ed.**

Secretary's Diary

I hope all of you are keeping well and wish the Almighty to keep you hale and hearty. Covid has now engulfed the entire country in its wily grip and the infection has spread beyond cities to countryside as well. More than 15 lakh people are now infected and casualties have crossed the 33-^{Thousand} mark. India has become the third most infected country in the world and situation is going from bad to worse every day. Now, we keep on hearing sad news of casualties among our own Gandhian fraternity. The scenario is really dismal and painful.

Common people are suffering. It is the Kharif time and peasants are occupied in the fields. At many places, there are problems related to non-availability of seeds and of spurious seeds also. Assam, Bihar and Bengal are facing severe floods. Cyclone has devastated almost half of Bengal. Central government did not provide enough support to the state government; even one fourth of the aid demanded by the CM has not been given. In such scenario of floods, pandemic and calamity, power-brokers at democratic market are active as usual. After toppling elected government in M.P., now preying of MLAs is on in Rajasthan. Similar efforts are going on in Chhattisgarh. Similar malpractices were done in Rajya Sabha elections also. One can imagine, in what direction Indian democracy is moving now.

All Centres of Gandhi Smarak Nidhi are functioning with due Covid protocols. Mumbai Centre has started working once in a week. All colleagues in Mumbai are safe. Since last Kasturba Jayanti function, Gandhi Study Circle at Jaipur has organised many more workshops. Activities like *Shramdaan* and serving the birds and animals are going on. In M.P. Gandhi Smarak Nidhi, farmers' training is also being undertaken besides agricultural chores. In Assam Centre, agriculture and production of Khadi-related products is going on. Relief work is being undertaken by Karnataka Centre. Centres in Kerala, Tamilnadu, Bengal, U.P., Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and other states are function now, following due Covid precautions. As the situation is turning grim, everybody has been advised to

work with utmost care and all efforts should be focussed towards the well-being of villages and villagers.

Western enterprise has its usual tendency of hiding its failures behind the veil of attractive achievements. In similar vein, India's political masters are hiding their failures by projecting false achievements in quite surprisingness and dramatic manner. This shows the cunning of capitalist powers. A large segment of our people has been so mesmerised that they have started believing this farce as genuine welfare activity. This mindset is not rational and may result in long term irreparable damage to the country.

Even though the present system appears to be democratic, it is becoming increasingly difficult to run the system in genuine interest of the people. Decentralisation of political power is still a dream. Elected representatives for State Assemblies and Parliament are being sold out, power is defunct of ideals and ideologies, democracy has been turned into a market place. How can democratic values be established in such scenario? Political, as well as economic centralisation is at its peak. The dream of swaraj fostered by our founding fathers entailed decentralisation of political and economic powers. Both were inter-related. But our present leaders think otherwise - they support and promote centralisation which is the main cause of present bereavement of India.

Press Clipping

More Than One Voice

Rajmohan Gandhi

Long after our world bids farewell to CO VID-19, a sentence uttered quite close to the virus's birth is likely to be remembered. On January 30, Li Wenliang, a 34-year-old Chinese doctor in Wuhan, said: "I think there should be more than one voice in a healthy society." On February 7, a day after the *Straits Times* of Singapore published his remark, Li succumbed, in a Wuhan ICU, to the virus he had tried to cure in others.

On December, 30, 2019, Li informed a WeChat group of his medical school alumni that seven patients who had physically contacted local seafood market had been placed in isolation wards in his hospital. They had been diagnosed, said, Li in his message, with an acute respiratory disease. A screen-shot of his message was leaked. Four days later, Li was reprimanded by Wuhan's police for "Spreading rumours online and disrupting social order".

After the virus exploded, China's Supreme People's Court indirectly criticizes Wuhan's police. As quoted in the *Straits Times*, the Court said :

Centralised democracy has now putrefied. The need of the hour is that people should be more and more self-dependent in the management and governance of their local issues. Destiny of our people is not such a trifling thing which can be played upon by a handful wily people who have managed to usurp political and economic power by hook or by crook. We strive for such social order in which public is convinced that they, themselves are the makers of their economic and political - *Sanjoy Singha*

“It might have been a fortunate thing if the public had believed the ‘rumours’ then and started to wear masks and carry out sanitization measures, and avoid the wild animal market.” This was on January 28, four weeks after Li had been reprimanded and 10 days before his death. Openly rehabilitated after his death Li was even given one of China’s highest national honours.

The future is unlikely to dwell on that honour but his call for “more than one voice” will endure. I don’t think I am the only one in whom Li’s remark triggers thoughts about Gandhi, and not just because that remark was uttered on January 30. Recalling Gandhi and Li together, some reflections emerge.

One, the advice to listen to more than one view applies to every society and polity, not merely China’s. For example, before our Prime Minister Narendra Modi announces another far-reaching measure - something, say, like demonetization or a nationwide lockdown - he could ask for the opinions of his cabinet colleagues. Wouldn’t that be a “healthy” thing to do, and wise as well? Actually, he (and India) would gain if, on sweeping matters affecting our diverse land, Modi were to ask also for the views of our chief ministers. COVID-19 has made plain to everyone the critical role that chief ministers and district officers play. Li may not have realized it, but with his January 30 remark he was exposing the limited scope for wise action from afar. The large polities of China and India cannot be directed by one or two individuals.

Second, and perhaps even more importantly, Li’s advice is relevant for every Indian. The sequence from COVID-19 to nationwide lockdown to helpless, massive migration revealed our weakness as a society. India’s brutal reality was unmasked. If even that migration does not force us to admit the folly of India’s inequalities and hierarchies, what will?

Li’s sentence, and its context, puts me in mind also of young Gandhi’s efforts more than a century ago. Working against plague in Rajkot in 1896, a 26-year-old Gandhi found that the town’s Dalits kept their homes cleaner than the higher castes did. A few years later, in 1904, he and two compatriots in South Africa (Madanjit Vyavaharik and William Godfrey) put up a daring battle that saved the lives of several plague-hit Indians linked to an overcrowded settlement in Brickfields, outside Johannesburg. Persuading the Indians of Brickfields to vacate their unsafe colony and move to a new tent-town, Gandhi told them that “sanitation and

hygiene” had to be made “part of our being”, Overcrowding had to be “stamped out” and “we should freely let in sunshine and air”.

This Gandhi was 34, Li’ age at death. Thereafter, Gandhi warned year after year of what India’s 2020 migrations have made irrefutable: Indian society will remain diseased until our governments and governed, working together, renew life and livelihoods in our countryside. Future viruses surely lick their lips as they contemplate 1.5 billion Indians inhumanly packed into a dozen mega cities and a hundred smaller ones.

Finally, no matter how large the responsibility which the government of China must assume over the pandemic, no matter how uneasy the situation on India’s border with China, and notwithstanding

the shortage in democratic practice in China’s governance we cannot blame Chinese individuals in our hearts.

For all of us, COVID-19 has amplified a truth that Gandhi never ceased to repeat, which Li’s remark also hints at: Hate the sin, not the sinner. Or the sinner’s people. You may disagree with what a person says. You may dislike what he or she does. But you may not disdain the race, religion or ethnicity to which that person belongs.

By underscoring vulnerability of every member of the human family, COVID-19 has shown the silliness in blaming person for their skin-colour, blood-group or religion. Yet, who knows? If we are in love with our slumber of prejudice, we may sleep right through COVID-19’s relentless toll and emerge as uncontaminated as before by the notion of a common humanity.

Both before and during COVID’s attack, many of India’s residents who supposedly “look like the Chinese” have faced discrimination or abuse —Assamese. Khasis, Meiteis. Mizos, Nagas, Nepalis, Tibetans and others. I hope at least some Indians will resolutely oppose any drive, open or subtle, against the people of China or those allegedly looking like them.

COVID’s flash of danger is also a lightning of truth that exposes prejudice for what it is.

The writer is research professor of Centre for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Illinois.

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Editor : Ramchandra Rahi, Phone No. 011-23328723