

tion; there have been attacks on India's efforts to grow enough food for herself. The Indian delegate to one of the international conferences playfully pleaded that India should not be criticised for her efforts towards statistical self-sufficiency; after all, in reality the people need much more food than what the statisticians calculated for them.

Now, would Burma and Thailand assure a ready market for some of India's products so as to pay for the rice the Thais and the Burmese want to grow and sell to India? Certainly not, the co-operation suggested is purely one-way.

Once upon a time India did buy a lot of Burmese rice for use in Bengal and Kerala. But one day, two decades ago, the supplies stopped. Do the ECAFE planners have an instrument in their hands to ensure that such a thing may not happen again?

Let us take the fantastic plan Shri K B Lall and two other 'wise men' prepared at ECAFE's behest some two years ago for an organisation for Asian economic co-operation. There is a suspicion in some quarters that the Indian and Japa-

nese experts returned home and helped their governments to tear up the very proposals they had formulated. At the ECAFE conference in Tokyo which followed the wise men's report. Japan's Prime Minister Ikeda took only a few minutes to bury the plan. For him co-operation is in terms of co-prosperity.

Since co-operation means many things to many people in their self-interest, it may be a good idea for the various governments to pursue the clear avenues of non-cooperation in national interest, except where co-operation is unavoidable.

Mob Violence and Mass Apathy

A Problem of Political Organisation

Sisir Gupta

As the Indian National Congress was giving up its earlier pretensions of Indianising the socialist goal and adopting the familiar Western concept of democratic socialism as its objective, a large number of people in the country were agitated, for different reasons, over the loss of a sacred relic from a shrine in Kashmir.

That in December 1963 there were two issues in Indian politics symbolic of the different dimensions of Indian politics. socialism and Hazrat's hair was

Their co-existence may not indicate an equal degree of relevance to the issues in our public life, What it does indicate is that there are two different languages of politics in this country, two different political cultures. The subsequent chain of events in East and West Bengal indicate that, in all probability, it is the second set of issues rather than the first which arouses mass passions and urges in the sub-continent.

THIS gulf between the two languages and the two cultures enhances vastly the chances of mob violence and mob upsurge. All the Gandhian emphasis on non-violence notwithstanding, politics still remains a sphere in which violence is permissible. While we do have an aversion to and eschew other forms of violence, political violence is not ruled out in our scale of values. And such violence finds expression precisely in those areas where other forms of aggressive behaviour are not socially permissible.

Mob violence is a phenomenon by itself and should be treated as such. Even communal killings, the most extreme form of expression of communalism which remains subdued at other times, it is preferable to treat as a part of that broader phenomenon. In the post-Independence history of India and Pakistan, mob violence has been provoked in various ways; it has not been on account of communal passions alone.

In East Pakistan, for example, it was incited by the Bengali-Urdu controversy. Again, shortly after the 1951 elections, riots broke out in Narayanganj and some other parts of the province. A year earlier, Lahore witnessed serious violent upsurges against the Ahmediyas in which a great deal of loss of life and property was reported. Likewise, in India, the Assam disturbances of 1960 arose from attacks on the Bengali settlers. In Madras, caste riots had occurred earlier and in Bombay, the movement for a separate State of Maharashtra led to violent riots. It may be necessary for political analysts to treat all these incidents together and make a study of the cases of mob violence within a single frame of reference.

Political Processes Not Relevant

Pending such studies, it would be worthwhile to speculate whether the chances of mob violence in India have increased or diminished over the years. The events of 1916-47 will always remind us that occasions

may arise when politics is taken to the streets, when the established political processes become irrelevant, and when events begin to take their own course without anyone being able to control or guide them. Much has been written on the partition of India. The usual method in viewing this most important event of our history has been the historical one. Some have gone to the extent of declaring that the issue of partition was determined when Aurangzeb ousted Dara Shiko, while others have emphasised events like the Congress refusal to accept the Muslim League in the U P Cabinet in 1937. There may be an element of truth in these views but what needs to be pointed out is that the established political processes had collapsed after 1946 when mob violence occurred in large parts of the sub-continent. With the exception of Mahatma Gandhi who had the moral courage to go down to the streets in an effort to restore sanity, all other political leaders of India

virtually withdrew to the safe resorts of New Delhi and Simla and carried on negotiations with the British Government. It would be surprising if these negotiations were not influenced by the background of violence against which they were conducted. It would be wrong in any case to regard the partition of India as the culmination of a series of deliberate decisions on anybody's part, rather than as a timid obeisance of the political leaders to the dictate of events. The example of the predicament of politics in the days of the partition is often forgotten today. But it does provide an insight into the nature of politics in a society like ours which is still of great relevance today and perhaps will be of relevance for many years to come.

It is of course true that after 1947, there has been no large scale massacres. The outbreaks have been smaller in extent and though they might have put law and order under serious stress in different parts of the sub-continent at different points of time, there has been no general threat to the stability of the States. And the calling in of the army to tackle the situation, whether it is in Lahore in 1953 or Calcutta in 1964, did help to restore normalcy. This should, however, be no reason to underestimate the gravity of the situation or to forget that Indian politics moves on a razor's edge. In a way, it is inherent in the nature of such violence that it should subside after a period. Also, it is not safe always to ask the army to tackle situations of this kind.

One might mention in this connection the mass action a few months back in the city of Calcutta against the traders and businessmen when food prices shot up. This is in sharp contrast to the behaviour of the people in Calcutta exactly 20 years ago when the conscience of even Jawaharlal Nehru was seriously disturbed by the fact that shops were full of foodstuffs in Calcutta while hundreds of thousands perished on the streets. It is possible that there has been a general rise in the level of mass participation in these forms of politics. The point to be noted is that those who were prepared to resort to force in order to stop

profiteering in food were not necessarily those who took the lead in the communal riots. The mechanism of unleashing the two different kinds of violence is different so also the leaderships which instigate them. But it is difficult to differentiate between the two forms of violence when the operational aspects of the two are taken into account.

Basically the problem remains what it was in 1937 when the Congress leftists had talked of Muslim mass contact. The best answer to communal violence is not to try to eliminate all forms of political participation by the untutored masses but to substitute one form of participation by another. If only a method could be found of permitting action against the profiteering traders and eliminating the killings of the Muslims (or linguistic minorities and so on), the problem would be easier to tackle. But what, again, has to be remembered is that it is not easy in a society where class differentiation has not yet replaced the other senses of belonging with functional or class attitudes. There is a great deal of naivete in the application of the classical Marxist solution of such problems in societies where the situations are not Marxian.

The task of political modernisation in societies like ours is indeed much more complex and varied than emphasis exclusively on economic issues indicates. In fact such emphasis often tends to make politics itself irrelevant for many. The challenge that the situation poses, therefore, needs to be faced intellectually, to begin with.

Some social scientists have pointed out that mass apathy and mass violence go hand in hand and it is only the penetration of organised politics into the lower layers of society that can overcome mass apathy. In its essence, the problem is one of political organisation rather than of political slogans and it is here that one must return to the theme with which we started, namely the co-existence of Bhubaneswar and Calcutta in our public life.

The usual tendency to ridicule Congress socialism is based on the apprehension (or hope) that the Congress does not really mean it. It should, however, be noted that

even without any ideological commitment to socialism, it is the logic of a dominant party system that the Congress should undertake a great deal of expansion of State activities. If socialism is defined merely as the expansion of the public sector or the growth of State Capitalism, the Congress Party's capacity to carry forward the socialist task seems to be great, whatever be the ideological indifference among Congressmen. In recent years, some of the Congress Party bosses have increasingly used the co-operatives for their politics. It is also widely known that in some States of India, nationalised road transport, for example, has become an important instrument in the hands of the State bosses for managing politics. It is inevitable, apart from any other thing, that there will be an internal political compulsion for the Congress to expand the public and the co-operative sectors of the economy. But, whatever the economics of it, in political terms, it can go precious little towards the furtherance of the goal of a modernised political structure. In fact, the present state of management of our public enterprises may further deepen public apathy and increase the indifference to political processes and enhance thereby the chances of mob violence on other issues. Much as Bhubaneswar indicated a strengthening of the leftist fringe in the Congress, events in Calcutta stressed the need for a thorough reassessment of our political styles and techniques. The time has come to call a halt to our present tendency of putting all our eggs in the only handy basket we have — that of democratic socialism.

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