

inspired millions to rise above the sordidness and vulgarity of animal existence and to walk in the path of godliness.

From the pre-historic times, India has been the home of such Ascetic Orders. The famous Mohenjo-daro seal of a date at least 5,000 years old, depicts Pashupati sitting naked in a yogic pose. The *Vedas* refer to the long-haired ascetic—Lord Shiva sitting on Mount Kailasa, almost naked and besmeared with ashes, as appropriately their guardian deity. These orders have played a great part in recreating from time to time the religious life of the people and purging it of dross, and their influence has also spread to many parts of the world.

The pre-eminent among these Orders, according to tradition, was founded by Shukadeva, the ascetic son of Veda Vyas, who as the pre-eminent prophet of our race and the author of the *Mahabharata*, still dominates our religion and thought. Later, Mahavira, who lived in the sixth century,

became the head of another Ascetic Order, which still keeps Jainism alive. Again, Buddha, in the same century, was the founder of still another Ascetic Order which to-day dominates religion in many countries in Asia from Sri Lanka to Japan. The Greeks, who came to India with Alexander, met the naked philosophers, the Gymnosophists.

About 796 A.D., Shankara was initiated as a *sanyasi* of the Ascetic Order founded by Vyas' son Govindapada, a very learned *sanyasi*, who lived in a cave at Omkar Mandhata on the banks of the Narmada.

Under Govindapada, the boy prodigy mastered all the known non-secular Sanskrit literature. He was also initiated into the doctrine of Absolute Monism.

Shankara established *Pithas* in the North, East, West and South and they are still engaged in fostering his philosophy and message with an unbroken continuity and vigour.

## From the Bhavan's President Religion and 21<sup>st</sup> Century

R. Venkataraman

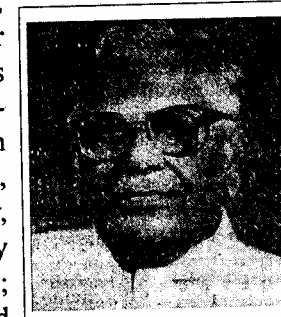
Very often the malady is apparent but the remedy is elusive. There is no readymade panacea for social ills. Against individual acts of violence, there is no other remedy than self-restraint.

The twentieth century witnessed far greater multi-directional growth and development than any other century in recorded history. The Wright brothers flew the flying machine, scientists put satellites into orbit and revolutionized communication; the computer exceeded human capacity in every department of activity; the atom split for peaceful uses was misused for mass destruction; communism went through birth, growth, resplendency, degeneration and decay in the Soviet Union; colonies were liberated

by voluntary transfer of power and a multi-polar world became bi-polar and then uni-polar towards the end of the century.

The dark side of the picture is equally stunning. According to Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), out of the estimated 6 billion population in the globe, nearly a quarter is hungry., 80% of the World's resources are consumed

by 20% of the population. Such an unequal distribution cannot be sustained except by force, political or economic. Even among the advanced countries, all kinds of violence are break-



ing out. Renowned cities of the world are plagued by *mafia* of different varieties like arms, drugs

and sex. Rivalries among gangs lead to reckless killings, arson and loot.

Aggressive salesmanship through the electronic and print media kindles consumerism and an uncontrollable desire to possess more and more. This breeds violence in the shape of robberies, dacoities and murders. In developing countries, consumerism leads to uncontrollable jealousies and engenders class conflicts.

Religious fanaticism and bitterness are major causes for violence. Though all religions preach "Thou shall not kill, rob, cheat, utter falsehood" and so on, their followers cast these to the winds and indulge in violence and hatred in the name of saving their religion.

**Though all religions preach "Thou shall not kill, rob, cheat, utter falsehood" and so on; their followers cast these to the winds and indulge in violence and hatred in the name of saving their religion.**

Suppression of minorities and ethnic groups within the State, leads to State-sponsored violence. The demand for self-determination by the ethnic minorities is also backed by terrorism.

Organised violence in pursuit of an objective turns into terrorism, taking toll of the lives of innocent people who have nothing to do with the issue. Indiscriminate bombing of public places, killing important personalities, hijacking of aircraft and derauling trains have become almost an everyday occurrence all over the globe. The sufferings of the innocent people by terrorist activities do not receive as much attention as the inhuman treatment of those accused of such crimes. Human Rights Organisations seem to be more concerned

with the rights of the accused than with the sorrows and sufferings of the victims of terrorism. Not a day passes without reports of violence against individuals, religious groups, ethnic communities, or state repression of minorities, class conflicts and terrorist onslaughts. Unless the World Community wakes up to the imminent danger, life in the planet may revert to the barbarian past.

Religious and ethnic conflicts are breeding ground for terrorism. It leads to counter-insurgency, genocide and terrorist movements. I think more blood has been shed by terrorism than by wars. True democracy is a government in consonance with Public Opinion or as John Stuart Mill put it: the 'general will of the people'.


Periodical elections and debates in Parliament are only trappings of democracy. These are means to ascertain the public opinion but are not themselves the pith and

substance of democracy. Recognition of minority rights, inspiring confidence in ethnic groups by liberal attitudes towards them, may save many ugly outbursts of violence. Instead, resorting to suppression of these segments engenders only State terrorism, civil wars and disruption of life. The events in Sri Lanka and Yugoslavia bear testimony to this.

Very often the malady is apparent but the remedy is elusive. There is no readymade panacea for social ills. Against individual acts of violence, there is no other remedy than self-restraint. It is only religion with its taboos and mystic admonitions that make man control his primitive passions. The fear of God and of His Judgement on the day of reckoning inhibits man from doing wrong, or committing sinful act. This is the subjective check that unconsciously keeps Man on the right path. No society can exist unless the people voluntarily observe

code of conduct. It is wrong to think that man adheres to the right path for fear of Law. It is because 90% of the people observe the Law voluntarily and a 10% violate it that law-enforcing authorities are able to maintain Law and Order. If, on the other hand, 90% of the people flout the Law and mere 10% comply with it, there will be no Society, there will be only chaos. The fundamental unity

of religion lies not in the acceptance of the Ultimate Supreme Being. Buddhism does not recognize the Supreme Lord. It is in virtuous life, preached and practised that all religions totally agree. If every person followed diligently, faithfully and conscientiously, the tenets of his religion there would be no violence, hatred, crime and no human misery.

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## Man of the Millennium Mahatama Gandhi

### Strikes in Democratic Society

In a well-ordered democratic society, there is no room, no occasion for lawlessness or strikes. In such a society, there are ample lawful means for vindicating justice. Violence, veiled or unveiled, must be taboo.

Strikes, in coal mines or elsewhere, mean material loss to the whole society, not excluding the strikers themselves.

I need not be reminded that this declamation does not lie well in the mouth of one like me who has been responsible for so many successful strikes.

If there be such critics, they ought not to forget that then there was neither independence nor the kind of legislation we have now.

I wonder if we can remain free from the fever of power politics or the bid for power which afflicts the political world, the East and the West.

Labour has made great strides. But much remains to be done yet. I cannot be satisfied till the credit of labour rises higher than that of capital.

Nor should labour be satisfied.

That position will not be attained till unity, 100 per cent honesty and education with knowledge are acquired. There is no place for caste, creed or communalism in the ranks of labour. There is equality of rights between men and women.

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