

Challenge of Racism and Globalization

An Overview of the Situation

The people of India learnt of the atrocities perpetrated on the blacks in South Africa by the white minority government which ruled the country ruthlessly with unspeakable bestiality and brutishness from the reports of nonviolent resistance led by Mohandas K. Gandhi against apartheid and racial prejudices of the worst kind. Despite the British Rule in India, the newspapers gave a harrowing account of the miseries suffered by the people of Indian origin on account of their colour. They had already tasted some of the severities in their own country at the hands of their counterparts who presided over the destiny of 500 million people. Apart from what the world witnessed in South Africa, racial discrimination in some or the form was being practiced in many parts of the world including USA which supposedly was a democratic country. The vast multitude consisting mainly of black negroes was deprived of legitimate rights. In the sixties Martin Luther King Jr. raised a voice against this act of cruelty and led a crusade against the racial discrimination. He had to pay the price at the hands of an assailant who shot him dead because he loathed his work. If we look back and study the history of human civilization, we will come across countless examples of social, economic and political persecution of defenceless people who were subjugated and subjected to dehumanization while on the other hand economically and socially privileged people thrived on unlimited powers.

The question that arises before us is how human minds are poisoned and seeds of hatred are sown in an organized way. As a result prejudices are passed on from one generation to another. Consequently we find a large number of social groups pitted against one another in bloody battles. There is no denying the fact that all humans are born equal and civil societies across the world have now begun to realize that the dream of a just world can come true only if all inequities originating in ethnic, racial, social, political and religious consideration are ended completely. Unfortunately wells of poison have seeped so deep into our souls for centuries that we have erected tall and uncompromising walls of hatred built on racial and caste prejudices between people. Racism came into being with the origin of human society itself. That is why almost all religious traditions have such teachings in their holy texts as '*never treat your fellowbeings as low or high. All human beings are children of God and are equal in all respects.*' Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavira - the two greatest spiritual leaders of the Shramanic tradition - opposed the caste system that prevailed in the Indian society two thousand five hundred years ago. They exhorted their followers to rise above this narrow outlook and treat all humans as equal. Mahavira went a step further. He pleaded for the equality of all *jivas* be they human beings or animals or plants or even microbes. Lord Mahavira forbade his disciples to kill any living being or show contempt towards others. It is a fact that casteism is rooted very deeply in the Indian social psyche. It is the world's largest surviving social hierarchy. Caste encompasses a complex ordering of social groups on the basis of ritual purity. Though it cannot be likened to racial prejudice in true sense of the word, it creates the same ruthlessness and cruelty as are found in racial

practices. A person is considered a member of the caste into which he or she is born and remains within the caste until his death. Differences in status are justified by the religious doctrine of *karma*, a belief that one's place in life is determined by one's deeds in previous lifetime. The greatest stigma attached to the Indian caste system is 'untouchability.' The low caste Hindus called Harijans or Mehtars are segregated and treated as untouchables even though the law considers it a punishable offence. But these oppressed people didn't rebel against this atrocious social custom for centuries because they also shared the belief that they were born in a low caste on account of the sins of their past lives. In many states of India particularly Bihar caste violence is on the increase. Strangely enough democracy in India has polarized society on caste lines and people openly vote in favour of their caste candidates. Political leaders are in collusion with the local caste leaders. It is the illiterate uneducated people in the backward or low caste categories that are persecuted.

Then came Mohandas Gandhi who took cudgels against these evil practices and organized courageous campaigns condemning caste discrimination and exploitation. He created awareness in the Hindu society and educated the masses. The result was the incorporation of special privileges for the down-trodden in the Indian Constitution in the form of reservations of some seats in parliamentary constituencies and State Assemblies as well as in Government jobs. The Indian Constitution gives equal rights to all the citizens irrespective of their caste, colour and creed. But the post-Independence era in India is marked by polarization based on narrow caste prejudices and despite 53 years of Independence the Indian society is riven by caste conflicts and social prejudices.

The coming of Hitler in the first half the 20th century is marked by racial upheavals, genocides and holocausts. His theory of the racial supremacy of the Germans unleashed a reign of terror and led to the bloodiest World War Second culminating in the extermination of six million jews and the nuclear holocaust at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Millions of people were killed. The Japanese too didn't lag behind and caused untold suffering to the people of South East Asia. What is important to mention here is that the emergence of typical mindsets in the world order created rifts in the even tenor of social life leading to fragmentation of humanity. The noted historian Arnold Toyanbee has remarked in his book '**The Study of History**' that racial conflicts originate in 'the interplay between a human nature which is common to all mankind and certain exceptionally unfavourable circumstances in the local environments of some sections of the human family during certain periods of time. The importance of social schism lies in its being the outward sign of a spiritual rift which scars the souls of individuals who *'belong'* to a disintegrating society. Beyond the social expressions of disintegration lie the personal crises of behaviour and feelings and life which are the true essence and origin of the visible manifestation of social collapse.' Racism has to do more with a particular mindset developed in a group due to typical circumstances. The roots of this dangerously developing worldwide phenomenon are the human minds which need to be cleansed of the venomous infection. Let us remember the warning given by Toyanbee that mankind is surely going to destroy itself unless it succeeds in growing together into something like a single family.

Birth of UN: Collective Action Against Racism

The Second World War which was the direct result of the notion that the German race was superior hence it alone had the right to rule the world. This notion according to Toyanbee is the manifestation of the schism in the soul. After the surrender of Germany in May 1945 Japan fought on until the US dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the August of that year. It was only after this terrible destruction that the conscience of humanity was awakened and it once again strove for human solidarity. The result was the birth of United Nations on October 24, 1945. It only showed the rise of human sanity. When we talk of the new trends of racism manifesting themselves again worldwide it will be in fitness of things to refer to UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights which are the most significant achievements of humanity.

The signing of the UN Charter in October 1945 by 51 countries in San Francisco heralded the end of the age of barbarity and racial atrocities though the goal was still difficult to achieve. Apartheid remained in practice in South Africa till 1994 when Nelson Mandela was sworn in as South African President. Articles 1 and 2 of the Universal Declaration state that *'all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights' and are entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration without distinction of any kind such as race colour, sex, language, religion, political and other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.* The articles 3 to 21 set forth the civil and political rights and 22 to 27 set forth the economic, social and cultural rights. Again in 1963 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the **Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination**. Also in 1993 The Commission on Human Rights appointed a Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

This brief account of the UN's contribution to combating racism will familiarize the readers with the efforts made at global level to eliminate racism but the campaign against racism received a big jolt on September 11, 2001 when a group of frenzied religious Muslim fanatics rammed into the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and killed four thousand innocent people.

September 11, 2001 Tragedy: Beginning of a New Wave of Racism

The germs of racism which were dying following the worldwide pattern of civilized thinking set in motion by UN and accredited NGOs were activated again after the September 11 tragedy. Once again the racial prejudices which were lying dormant in human minds in all parts of the world came to the fore. Muslims and most Asians began to be looked down upon and treated in the most humiliating manner at different airports in the Western World. Once again we see a wave of prejudiced thinking sweeping the world. Though we have the UN Declarations calling for an end to all forms of injustice, human rights violations and elimination of racial discrimination, the monster of racism seems to have raised its head clandestinely operating in mysterious ways. We often hear hair-raising stories of the insults and humiliation heaped upon most respected broad-minded and unbiased citizens during their travels and stays in Europe and USA only

because of their colour. Restrictions have been imposed on the issue of visas and even if they get them, they are deported as soon as they arrive in USA or Europe. One most dangerous aspect of this '*schism in the soul*' is that a large number of people in Europe and USA are being swayed by this prejudice. The recent elections in Germany are an eye opener. Though the rightist candidate representing the extremist thinking lost the election, it has stunned the right thinking people in the world who stand for equal rights and who have been crusading for social justice and racial discrimination. It is our pious duty to nip the evil in the bud. No laws or declarations can check this worldwide psychic phenomenon unless a global social campaign goes on side by side. We have to strengthen the human rights campaigns and campaigns aimed at creating a just nonviolent socio-political world order. Any complacency in this regard is going to cost us heavily. Under the auspices of the United Nations there are other agencies too which are doing seminal work to root out the seeds of violence generated by social prejudices against the coloured and the destitute. After the World War Second the world-famous cultural anthropologist Margret Mead concluded on the basis of her scientific work that '*warfare is only an invention - not a biological necessity.*' The statement came against the widely prevalent belief that violence and war cannot be ended because they are part of our natural biology. But we now know it well that slavery has been successfully ended and efforts are going on to end domination by race and sex. If it were part of natural biology, slavery couldn't have been put and end to.

Long ago psychoanalyst Sigmund Freyd wrote to physicist Albert Einstein "*there two factors - man's cultural disposition and a well-founded fear of the form that future wars will take - may serve to put an end to war. But by what ways or byways this will come but we cannot guess.*" To find out the ways UNESCO organized a meeting of scientists in Seville in the international year of peace i.e. 1985 who issued a statement called **Seville Statement** which is a breakthrough in the accepted belief that war and violence are biological dimensions and cannot be ended. The scientists' conclusion that '*the same species who invented war is capable of inventing peace is highly significant in the present context.*' Racism is the result of a specific mentality, a cultural disposition. Seville Statement makes it clear that it is possible to root out these evil practices. We must educate young people to invent peace. If we can do that racism will be eliminated in reality.

Globalization

'*Annihilation of distance*' has reduced the planet to a global village. I am not talking of the physical distances alone but also of the rapid growth of communication systems which establish instant contact with individuals and organizations situated in any part of the world. The process of globalization that is sweeping the world today has also created many problems for the people. Multinational companies want to monopolize trade and economies of the world widening their hook to ensnare poor struggling masses. In a way this process is paving the way for the emergence of new colonial powers rooted in economic greed who will treat labouring humans nothing more than horses and camels in the days to come. We discover most disturbing symptoms of distrust and hatred evinced in the behaviours of these neoagents of colonization. What is agonizing is that

they are trying to colonize human minds. Those who fall prey to these neocolonists willingly drum up support for their work and help spread their dragnet. This process of colonizing human minds is the most dangerous phenomenon. The ethno-religious conflicts that raged in Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Quebec and Northern Ireland taking a heavy toll of human lives continue to rage in the Indo-Pak subcontinent. They are new forms of racial conflicts and are the by-products of the process of globalization. The old mindsets are mushrooming all around albeit in mysterious clandestine ways which need to be curbed at grassroots levels. Globalization has widened the gaps between the haves and the have-nots and are making the lives of the poor more miserable and extremely deplorable. It is sparking the human instinct to dominate and rule. Once the instinct is roused the means to achieve the aim become secondary giving rise to a new era of subjugation, exploitation and atrocities. The proponents of globalization are new *avatars* who appear to be saviours by means of oratory and glib talks but are the hidden monsters who will swoop down on vulnerable sections of humanity in the course of time and devour them. The challenge of racism is real and it needs to be fought with determination and courage.

The Role of Religion and Social Movements

Religion has an important role to play in reversing this trend. As has already been stated in the opening pages that all the religions preach equality and dignity for all humans irrespective of their caste and colour and can be an instrument for change. We in India have a religious movement called **Anuvrat Movement**. It was launched by Late His Holiness Acharya Tulsi in 1949 and has since inspired millions of people to practise purity and self-discipline in personal life. The ultimate aim of the Movement is to create a non-violent socio-political world order with the help of a worldwide network of self-transformed people. His Holiness Acharya Mahapragya, successor of Late His Holiness Acharya Tulsi, is continuing the lofty tradition now. Under his dynamic leadership, the ANUVRAT MOVEMENT fortified with two new dimensions in the form of *Preksha Meditation* (Perceptive Meditation) and *Jivan Vigyan* (Science of Living) is slowly widening its base and attracting a large number of people in all parts of the world. *Anu* means small and *vrata* means a vow. As a matter of fact it is a movement of vows that enjoin the members of the Movement to practise minimum basic values. The movement aims at ridding the world of violence and hatred embedded in ethnic, caste, religious and political considerations.

Acharya Mahapragya has a dream to see the advent of an idealistic society based on ethical norms. Here is the ethical code of conduct laid down for those who volunteer to become **Anuvratists** or the *adherents of anuvrat*:

1. I will not kill any innocent creature.
2. I will neither attack anybody nor support aggression and will endeavour to bring about world peace and disarmament.
3. I will not take part in violent agitation or in any destructive activities.

4. I will believe in human unity, will not discriminate on the basis of caste, colour, etc.
5. I will practise religious tolerance.
6. I will observe rectitude in my dealings with other people.
7. I will try to develop a pure tenor of life and control over senses.
8. I will not resort to unethical practices in elections.
9. I will not use intoxicants like alcohol, hemp, heroin, etc.
10. I will lead a life free from addictions.
11. I will do my best to refrain from such acts as are likely to cause pollution and harm the environment.

If the young and old are inspired to adhere to this ethical code of conduct rooted in basic values, racial discrimination in any form will disappear from the planet. No laws can end the racial prejudices manifesting themselves in the West in the wake of September 11 catastrophe and globalization unless efforts are made at grassroots level to bring about psychological transformation in the thinking patterns of young people who are the future citizens.

There are many other religious and social movements in the world which are doing commendable work to unify forces of peace and nonviolence. We must evolve an international coalition of these organizations and launch a united action to curb racial tendencies growing in human minds giving rise to forces of social disintegration. Let us hope sanity will prevail and the world will be saved the scourge of racism which can create more cracks in the already divided human society leading to the Third World War.