

Violence In Contemporary India

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Violence, individual and collective, has been an integral part of human evolution. It has been both organized and spontaneous. After the dawn of civilization under the divisive social structure, however, it has been adopted by the elite for their social dominance. For the marginalized, on the contrary, it has been primarily a form of protest against the process of marginalization. The conflicting social interests of the two bred and manifested violence in every social relations. It was, however, localized prior to the market economy. Under the expanding market economy now it has speeded up the breakup of traditional property relations, civility and tolerance. Conjoined with urban alienation this social transition has aggravated the manifestations of violence menacingly. Resultant of it, contemporary India generates an image of escalating violence in every form of social relations, both in magnitude and in intensity. It conjures up an image of social degeneration from its idyllic past. It creates an illusion of the impending Hobbesian state of nature of animalistic existence. It reflects symptoms of the underlying malaise.

The tendency of violence is in-built in the production process of market that also permeates in the other forms of its economy premised on the profit. The market propels the business in its expansion; the business in need of survival constantly expands the market. The market in order to be satisfied compels the business for the expansion of production process and for the upgrading of technology. Further, in order to compete, the business, improves its productivity. The improved productivity, in turn, is accomplished by cost cutting which is accentuated by actual wage reduction and long working hours. The wage earners resist both. To overcome it, the labour is retrenched and is substituted by new technological input. In this mechanization process, the labour becomes the part of automation and to survive, he competes with machines; he becomes a specialist, a professional. In his workplace, he works like a machine; and in his off hours he replenishes his wear and tear. In course of time he breaks down, his alienation is complete, or he rebels. His intensity of rebellion depends upon the proportion of his dehumanization which manifests in variegated forms in different social relations. Either it is paid back in brutality (individual/collective) or it adopts radical measures for social change. In both the cases, beyond a threshold point, the system is changed either incrementally or radically. While in the alienated condition, the labour accepts the dominance of the others over his individuality or as a rebel he refuses to accept this dominance and protests (in different forms) for social change. One of the forms of protest is violence, individual and collective, revolutionary and non-revolutionary that reflects his non-acceptance of dominance which becomes more intense if the society is largely young particularly when there is massive rural–urban structural transition under the market economy. It is this in-built requisite of market-profit-that creates condition for the perpetration of violence.

The market makes the traditional rural structure redundant and propels the migration of the people to urban centers. The displacement from the old habitat, arrival in new urban social milieu and engagement in new kinds of jobs compel

the people to react to new situations which become elephantine due to deficit of democratic mechanism at workplaces and absence of extended family/ informal social support in private domain. Conjoined with the pressure of jobs, their competitive performance requirements, urban living conditions and its cultural requisite the traditional tolerance of people lose its strength in course of time. The accumulated, aggregate hostility towards their condition of existence tend to explode in the absence of traditional restrain mechanisms. It becomes violent.

In the escalation of violence, both in intensity and in its social magnitude, the divisive social structure play a catalytic role. The division crystallizes for control over and for appropriation of social resources either generated by labour or bestowed by nature. In the process of this struggle, the elite adopts all the possible measures to maintain their dominance which is resisted by labour as it accentuates their expropriation. This structural contention facilitates violence that manifests in many forms, the prominent being the political/state violence used by elite to break the resistance of the labour. But it may be acknowledged that in democracy violence is used generally as the last resort of dominance. The easier method is the use of ideological apparatus to create ideological confusion in the ranks of labour to check the crystallization of their unity or to create a section of labour as buffer between the mass of the labour and the elite to absorb the tremor of conflict. The coercive apparatus is unleashed generally as last measure to break their resistance. Under democracy, however, this situation is normally, not allowed to grow. The electoral politics, dominated by the agenda of the elite, subsumes the labour into its vortex. The different sections of the elite in their struggle for governmental power adopts every possible measure for electoral mobilization of people that divides them into different elite camps. More the market marginalizes the number of competing elites and of smaller political parties more intense becomes the electoral struggles of the parties/elite for their survival. Their struggle becomes more destructive in dimension whenever increasing number of people particularly unemployed youths, uprooted rural segments, floating labour get associated with them in search of power and pelf. And there is no break in this process. On the contrary, under the market economy due to the increasing concentration of property into fewer business units, closure of smaller production units and uprooting of peasants the electoral process has generated massive proportion of political violence. It has spiraled in proportion to the expansion of the market economy. Adding to it is the revolutionary violence of the left and the separatist/terrorist violence of other groups which fight the state for their respective agenda. They are forced to adopt the measure, it is argued, when the other measures fail to solve the problems of the people. The state forces them to adopt violent method in their self-defence¹ as it refuses to acknowledge the problems of the society through democratic methods and when people adopt violent method, the state brands them as terrorists and launches counter -terror method to eliminate them. Terror and counter-terror methods suit the state as state acquires innumerable power on the pretext of protecting civil liberties while, in reality, it crushes the citizens' liberties on the pretext of countering terrorism. In contradistinction to it, the state has always been loathed to peoples' movement for civil liberties as expansion of civil society has always curtailed the powers of the state. The state is, therefore, generally against

democracy.² At best, it only provides legitimacy to an issue when it already becomes part of the public domain. The expanding civil liberties, thus always restrict the purview of the elite and the state.

The divisive social structure, in brief, breeds condition through poverty, unemployment, illiteracy that tends to strengthen the state. It facilitates condition for violence particularly when the social structure is deficit of democratic decision making process in different spheres of private/ public domains.

The feudal colonial legacy has obstructed the development of a democratic structure and inculcation of its culture in the civic functioning of society. The institutionalization of representative democracy has created only the formal structure of governance. Its impact on the behavioural practices—formal and informal of the individual in the routine functioning of different organizations is negligent. From family to state, the impact of inscriptive authoritarian culture is imprinted on the civility of the individual. The electoral mobilization and public representation have broken the traditional culture but only to an extent. It has not yet substituted the authoritarian conduct of the personnel in the offices by their democratic practices. At best the patriarch of the family extends himself to public domain but with his uncontested sovereignty. This kind of attitude embedded with arrogance breeds frustration in the citizens that explodes at the first spark against the state.

The democracy deficit governance is in-built in the polity as the very governing organizations—the political parties—are themselves premised on the culture of undemocratic functioning. Their internal organizational structure stands on substantial degree of bogus membership, their leadership is nominated from the top rather than being elected by the genuine cadres of the parties, there is no timely election for different tiers of office bearers, there is no transparent funding, neither the accountability is fixed at every tier. The decisions taken are not by majority vote. The electoral manifesto is openly flouted. The rules are frequently broken and the criminals are awarded with legislative and executive assignments. In brief, the organizational structures of the parties and their culture of operation is elementary in democratic governance which largely tilts towards personality cult; and when such kind of political organizations are voted into power it is inevitable that governance will be democracy deficit; and in its absence the collective decision making process or adoption of majoritarian decision making process will be actively discouraged and opposed. Dissent will be intolerated and struggle for civil society will be suppressed. Or the movement for reorganization of structure from bottom to top becomes illegal, unconstitutional or seditious. When this anger is suppressed, it leads to political violence. More the political parties in order to deflect the anger of the citizens from their failure in good governance resort to all kinds of gimmicks or even to violence. The social implication of such deficit results in different forms of discrimination, enhancement of alienation and break out of violence. Aggrieved due to denial of justice, the intensity of anger and frustration of the groups, communities and of individuals aggravate the situation that leads to caste/religious/gender violence within private/ public domain. Had these groups/ communities/ individuals been

provided with democratic opportunities for injustice the magnitude/ intensity of violence would have considerably declined.

Finally, the most important crucibles are the indifference, and social apathy of large number of citizens towards the existing affairs that impact, considerably, the quality of governance and public acts of administrative personnel in general. The low level of consciousness also regulates their own personal relationship and their civic behaviour that tends to understand primarily the Kautilyan language of land. It blames others for the social problems instead of adopting self-reformatory approach for the development.

Thus the democracy deficit society in conjoint with market economy and divisive social structure has facilitated the growth of violence that requires surgical measures for its removal.

Contemporary violence is a part of a specific social process that has expanded rapidly in past few years. The break up gained momentum after 1947, particularly after the end of cold war leading to the removal of national trade barriers in 1991, has accelerated the growth of globalized market economy. Its rapid development has stressed every form of social relations causing breakdown of traditional civility without its substitute of modern mass civic culture. The alternative social structure has yet to stabilize and acquire its new culture. In this transitory period the following measures may be adopted to reduce violence :

1. School hours and admission age must be restructured and there must be reduction in the quantity of syllabus and in their overall work-load to minimize irritants in the development of child.
2. There must be compulsory and free school education and free health maintenance of students for an educated and healthy citizenry for knowledge society.
3. Laws must be modernized and their application must be stringent to deter the violators and others.
4. Justice must be certain and swift to check frustration and stress.
5. Urban traffic³ and slum locality must be improved to minimize city stress; even loud speakers may be removed from temples, gurudwaras and mosques.
6. Working hours of wage earners must be reduced, at least in private sectors and for the personnel of law and order machinery to reduce their stress; working condition within the offices must be democratized, i.e., the rigour of hierarchy and protocol must be modified; in the process of formulating decisions wide consultation, majority opinion must be institutionalized; accountability of each person must be fixed, in case of violation the person must be penalized; Ombudsman and vigilance machinery must be granted wide powers and must remain active to check malpractices; whistle blowers secrecy must be protected.
7. Civic agencies must be made publicly accountable to check anger among the citizens.
8. Right to employment/unemployment doles to citizens must be a fundamental right in order to provide a decent living condition to them.
9. The organizational structure and the functioning of the political parties must be democratized for a democratic governance: (a) there must be timely election at every tier of organization for office bearers, any attempt to

circumspect it must be penalized, (b) funding must be transparent, (c) violation of election manifesto must be legally punished (d) parties initiating political violence must be banned (e) election commission must be granted wide powers to regulate their democratic functioning.

10. Violence on television / internet must be regulated.

These measures, however, are temporary and contextual. It can, at best, reduce violence at a particular historical juncture. For a long term solution, few fundamentals of society need to be altered; these are the institutionalization of collective decision making process of civil society primarily of associated producers at every level of society and development of need based economy and capability based functioning of individuals in a knowledge society.

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References :

1. See K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol.25, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1987, p. 171.
2. See Rajni Kothari, *State Against Democracy*.
3. See Dinesh Mohan, *Mythologies, Metro Rail Systems and Future Urban Transport*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIII No. 4, pp 41-53.