

THE REALITY OF AMERICA

Azad Mahmud

Eighty percent of all black and latino male youths are languishing in jails, because they are easily drawn into violence because of their circumstances—poverty, lack of education, lack of opportunities to move up and beyond their milieu; all this in the richest country in the world. Though the USA ended racial segregation long back, de facto segregation exists; white people do not talk to black people; in the university cafeteria the dining hall is divided into two distinct halves, and one can take a look at the hall and come to an immediate conclusion. Black students are discouraged by the white professors from pursuing studies by several means—from giving them impossible tasks to perform to frightening them with the potential difficulty of the courses he/she plans to take. As a result, the blacks have turned virulently anti-American. They do not consider it as their own country, and the whites are only too happy to repress them.

On the other hand, the white students are grouped together, but they listen to the conversations others are having and they duly report them to the authorities—in this case the professors, who take it further up, if it is worth the trouble—if the contents are even slightly against the American ideology. The political contents of these dissident views are weighed, and if found to be departing from the American norms, the person in question is subjected to veiled questioning—over and over again. As a result, the dissident is forced to give answers which he knows, will satisfy the authorities. By repeating the same answers over and over again, the hapless person in question comes to believe in them. And if he refuses to conform, he will be weeded out by familiar means. To know, is the watchword of the authorities. They collect all the information that can be gleaned, about the person by using all possible means; from wire-tapping the phones, bugging the residence, the laboratory wherever the victim works, installing spy cameras in the car of the suspect to having him followed around on the campus by only too willing students hankering after rewards. The methods used bring Jeremy Bentham's Pan Opticon to the mind, as discussed in Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment*. But one cannot talk about these methods of espionage. If the victim opens his mouth, he will be sent to a psychiatric hospital. The American students are generally not suspects, because they have already been brain-washed. They repeat ad infinitum, the officially approved views. Criticism of existing views are not encouraged in the American system of thought control. This creates an utter lack of the method of critical enquiry in the American mind. So, apart from politics and economics, this spreads to scientific and technological enquiry. Thus, Americans cannot handle subjects such as mathematics and computer science that require a high degree of logical reasoning. In their attempt to root out dissent, the US government has eliminated all modes of critical approach. Without which serious scholarship is unthinkable. As a further example of the regimentation of thought, this writer would like to point out the fact that Americans have a ready phrase all occasions. Everyone repeats these phrases as necessary, thus troubling oneself to think independently.

The majority of the white American population remain docile because of its share, though marginal, in the super profits made by the dominant elite from its operations in the third world countries. It is this that antagonizes the white working class population, the majority of the wage-earners against the blacks, the latinos and other immigrants. They are sort of integrated to the ruling class by means of such divisive ideas as pitting "us" versus "they".

Thus it is said that depression is a white man's disease, that coloured people are violent and it is in their blood. The idea of traits being transmitted through blood belongs to Nazi ideology. Americans are always in search of pure white people to talk to, their search for purity of lineage is also basically a Nazi obsession. Because of its latent presence, the authorities are always on the lookout for explicit Nazi statements like "white supremacy" and so on, because they have a fear that the USA may go all the way to being a fascist state if not rooted out in the beginning. In reality, there is not much difference between human beings; there are many common traits between people of different races, but in the USA the accent is on the difference between peoples. And the difference is not only between white people and coloured people; there is a whole elaborate system of caste in the USA. At the top are the WASPs (white Anglo-Saxon protestants), with Greeks and Italians at the bottom of the hierarchy of white people. Then come the coloured people, with the blacks at the bottommost part. Nobody socializes with them. White people leave apartment blocks, once black people start moving in. This phenomenon is known as 'white flight'. The same is true of grocery stores; wherever black people shop, white people will not. Even there are separate churches for black and white people. The two communities are mutually exclusive.

Because of the thorough control of thought and behaviour of its people, the USA acts like a totalitarian state; it has total control over the lives of its citizens. In order not to allow its citizens to think independently, the media and such organizations as the churches and universities present images that carry a message; a message, normally pictorial, that impresses itself on the minds of millions of onlookers and shapes their ideology without having recourse to the more difficult path of ratiocination.

Most of the people are apathetic towards politics. They do not care who wins the elections, because nothing is going to change. It is the powerful corporations whose interests are looked after by the people's representatives, not those of the people. But, all the same the white students keep an eye on the foreign students, and if they utter one single word that does not conform with the 'party line', it will be reported back to those in power. They are awfully pompous about being Americans and they will not brook one word of criticism about their country. In this bastion of freedom of speech and thought, a single careless word can mar one's career, though nothing much happens to the white population, even if they make racial statements against the blacks, latinos or other minorities. For example, the word 'Aryan' is forbidden and hence not used at all, but an euphemism 'Caucasians' which means the same thing is freely used.

American society is so repressive, that ordinary people find it difficult to live under this constant unseen system of subjugation. That is why during the sixties there was such a huge swing towards counter-culture. It was a huge effort to shake off the regimented system off one's back. A meagre democratic space was thus created, but there is still lot to be done. The constant prying into the political beliefs of the students, the job-seekers is such that one becomes aghast very shortly; and quality suffers. It is not meritocracy that is the backbone of the American society, as claimed by noted sociologists, but sycophancy, ideological slavery. In truth Indians are not used to such probing into their inner lives, and hence easily fall sick of it.

Another thing that strikes the eye of an Indian arrived recently to this land of milk and honey, is the sense of property rights exhibited by the American students. No matter what it is, a pen, a book or a calculator. Though they talk about sharing everything all the time, nothing could be furthest from their mind. The same is true of their sermons of 'not hurting anybody physically'. Of course, they specialize in mental tortures, but their behaviour during

the Vietnam war or the present occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is not exactly compatible with the philosophy of a non-violent Gandhian.

Religion is another thing that blocks the mind of an American. Every other state is labeled a Bible belt! And because of this, they reject the theory of evolution. 'We did not descend from monkeys', is the angry rebuttal if anyone tries to reason with them regarding this. Even political decisions are based on Biblical references. Thus even George Bush said that the Palestine is the promised land of the Jewish people, so the USA will back them in their efforts to reclaim the whole of it. Another hidden reason leapt out before this writer in a class room, when the professor declared emphatically that the 'Jewish people are all white'. This may be the real reason why the USA supports Israel in all possible manner—from vetoing resolutions against Israel at the United Nations to sending financial help. Religion also makes them dream of crusades even now—a throwback to medieval times. □□□