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COMMUNAL HARMONY

BY

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COMMUNAL HARMONY

THE Indian political situation is like English weather. Everyone complains of it but no one seems able to alter it. The past few months have been months of deadlock. This deadlock logically points to ultimate conflict, but if one thing stands clear in the present situation, it is that no one wishes to embark upon the conflict which their words and speeches imply. Rather it is a case of

Lord Chatham with his sabre drawn,
Stood waiting for Sir Richard Strachan;
Sir Richard, longing to be at 'em,
Stood waiting for the Earl of Chatham.

This shivering upon the brink, this honourable hesitation, is something which gives us hope for the future. For it shows that there is something beyond party and personal and communal ambition which animates all groups, at any rate to some extent. It is the new spirit of Indian patriotism which realizes that the country must inevitably suffer from faction fights, that unity is something greater than immediate party advantage. There is a regular competition in the opening of political doors. No sooner does one side accuse the other of 'banging' the door

COMMUNAL HARMONY

than the other declares that it is still open. The din of political battle has become the sound of the turning of political door-knobs. What then is the situation? There are roughly three solutions before the country, all of which are incompatible with each other. There is first the Mahasabha solution. For the Mahasabha India is Aryavarta, the land of the Hindus. To the Hindus it belonged, and to the Hindus it must return; all others are minorities allowed to exist on sufferance. The Mahasabha is perfectly prepared to do a deal with one or other party if it thinks its ultimate aim not immediately attainable. Like the Catholic Church, it is able to think in centuries, not in years or even decades. But its ultimate aim, and its general attitude, is one to which no other community could possibly assent.

Next comes the Congress. The Congress is avowedly inspired by ideas of Parliamentary democracy, which come from the West, and more particularly from England. Burke and Mill and to a lesser extent Rousseau are the real progenitors of its ideas, and they have come down the years through the apostolic succession of Ram Mohan Roy, Ranade, Gokhale and the Mahatma himself. Now English democracy

COMMUNAL HARMONY

means that one representative Parliament has supreme power over all the lives of all the people. Parliament, says the proverb, can do anything save make a man a woman or a woman a man. Federation, as we know it in India, is only an adaptation of this principle to meet the problem of size. Therefore the majority, says the Congress, must rule, and the fact that the majority will be Hindus is of no more significance to the non-Hindu than the fact that the majority in England is Protestant is significant to the Catholic. Religious differences, in other words, are *denominational*—matters of ritual and worship mainly. As long as mosques and temples and *gurudwaras* are not interfered with, as long as conch shells can sound and temple bells ring, as long as the call to prayer can float over the fields or across the streets and the worshipper prostrate himself in reverence as he chooses, all will be well. The religions must keep out of politics just as the sects of England are expected to do. But this is just where the Congress theory breaks down, for the religions refuse to keep out of politics. Instead they rush in when any matter which affects their daily lives is touched. The Muslim and the orthodox Hindu attitude to the Sarda Act, the Sikh

COMMUNAL HARMONY

agitation which preceded the Gurudwara Act, and recent agitation about Hindi, both in North and South, illustrate this. The more these tendencies are studied, the clearer it becomes that the Congress dream of a political democracy which will disregard all divisions of race and community, is one which appeals only to the Hindu majority within its ranks. To others, Congressraj means Hindu-raj, and not all the charming of Mahatmaji and the Working Committee will disabuse them of this notion.

The third solution is provided by the Muslim League, and is the antithesis of the second. The differences of community and religion, which Congress regards as unreal or matters of personal opinion, are elevated by the Qaid-i-Azam into the fundamental divisions of the country. As oil and water, so Hindu and Muslim can never mix. Their fundamental outlooks are different. So we have the 'two nations' theory, and the dream of Pakistan. First conceived by the late Sir Mohammad Iqbal, this dream does not actually attract all Muslims, especially those outside the frontiers of Pakistan. Still less does it attract the minorities within it, so that there is already talk of a Khalistan, a Sikh enclave within the Punjab. It has the same

COMMUNAL HARMONY

objection for all non-Muslims as the Mahasabha scheme has for all non-Hindus. And it divides India. As such the scheme can never willingly be accepted by the rest of the country.

These three schemes are mutually exclusive of one another. While no one will make any concessions to others the British Government stands by in anxious helplessness, with no plan of its own beyond beseeching the parties to agree and promising to implement an agreement which it seems impossible to achieve. The time seems ripe for trying to break the vicious circle of charge and counter-charge, claim and counter-claim by some attempt at constructive thinking upon new lines. There are three broad issues which divide the Indian body social and politic at the present time. They are the political, the religious and the economic. We must recognize that each has a real existence and cannot be brushed aside as wishful thinking, as historic survivals or as hostile propaganda. Concentration upon the first to the exclusion of others has been the mistake of the Congress; concentration upon the second, the mistake of the Muslim League and the Mahasabha; and concentration upon the third the mistake of westernized economists and left-wingers. Each

COMMUNAL HARMONY

of these issues arises from the special circumstances of twentieth-century India, and every builder of the New India must take account of all of them. To deny the tensions which exist in any one of these spheres, or the deep-seated forces which are producing them, is not progressive, but unrealistic. Let us glance at each in turn. The political issue is that of self-government, of Swaraj, independence and democracy. Its strength lies in the educated classes with their ideals of unity and Parliamentarianism borrowed from the West. To deny the strength of this force would be foolish, to treat it as the *only* force in India would be still more so. The economic issues, the conflict of landlord and tenant, of capitalist and worker, cut across other divisions. But those who think them the *sole* issue forget that Central Europe since the last war has sacrificed wealth and prosperity on the altar of political and cultural nationalism. Next come the religious issues. A glance at the questions dividing the communities show that they are far more than rival interpretations of the same creed. They involve differing life views, differing ideals of living. The communities are not merely sets of people who go to different places of worship and have otherwise

COMMUNAL HARMONY

common modes of life or thought. They have different ways of living and dying, of marrying and giving in marriage. In legal phrase their personal law is different; in theological language their life-views and ethics are different; in political parlance their fundamental morality varies. We all have our own ways of life and we do not thank anyone who interferes, however good their intentions may be.

What then is the relation of these issues to one another? The essential fact is, I believe, that the political and economic discussions are shot through with communal bitterness just because the communal question is not realized to be a cultural question. Why is there so much suspicion? Because each community fears interference in its personal ways and ideals of life. Why has the Hindi question produced such heat? Because it arouses precisely those fears and suspicions. So long as these fears remain, no progress, political or social, will be made. And these fears will remain so long as each family feels that its freedom to conduct its life as it thinks right is being threatened by outside and incalculable forces.

The suggestion is that we should frankly recognize this fact. On the homeopathic principle

COMMUNAL HARMONY

we should cure communal bitterness by adding a tincture of communalism itself to our institutions. We must recognize the elements which differ as well as those which agree in modern India. We must recognize that each community is an integral part of the whole Indian family, with a right to settle its domestic affairs in its own way before we can expect them to co-operate together. Once this is done, the common elements in all communities will meet together on common ground instead of, as now, hostile ground, and will work together for the common mother-country in a way undreamt of before. The political issue with England would speedily be settled, for united India could make its own terms. The economic issues would then be tackled from the angle of justice and right instead of the angle of communal advantage.

In what follows the outline of a solution along these lines is attempted. There should be a federation of communities alongside the federation of provinces. First of all there must be a division of function between those matters which concern all Indians equally, and those which concern them as members of different communities. Those which concern all equally would be the

COMMUNAL HARMONY

province of the political administration. Examples of these are law and order, defence, communications, irrigation, the land administration, commerce and industry. Those which concern some citizens only would form the province of special bodies. These subjects would embrace all that is *peculiar* to a community and its communal life. Examples of these are the personal law and social customs of each community, the religious establishments and places of worship; and all those things which form the vehicles of traditional culture, such as language, literary traditions, and the cultural element of education.

The political subjects would be administered on lines roughly similar to those of the present time. There would be a distinction between the central and provincial governments; there would be a regrouping of provinces following more nearly the natural divisions of the country; there might be a less top-heavy and expensive superstructure in each of these provinces. The political governments, central and provincial, would be responsible to assemblies elected on a democratic franchise, and would be concerned only with political and economic issues. That being the case, the reason for communal electo-

COMMUNAL HARMONY

rates would disappear, and general electorates could be substituted throughout the country.

We now return to the special bodies which are to regulate the cultural life of the community. For them the name of 'guild' may be suggested; it is a word which possesses an honourable lineage in English history. It implies an organic union for constructive and creative purposes, and not, like the words 'group' or 'corporation' or 'association', chance collections of people united to further their own material interests. The craft guilds of the Middle Ages had for their purpose the regulation of particular crafts or industries. The good of one did not imply any injury to another, but rather the welfare of all. Modern economic groups, whether of the over- or under-privileged, too often measure their own success mainly in terms of injury done to others. The more one country has of the world's trade, the less must others have; but the more excellent the standard maintained by one craft guild in the production of its special article, be it gold or silver, ironmongery or haberdashery, the greater the general welfare. Similarly in India today, the more one community acquires of posts or trade or influence the less there is for others; but the more one

COMMUNAL HARMONY

community develops its own life on its own lines, the greater the cultural riches of the whole commonwealth. India's genius consists in variety; her need is that of unity. Her supreme problem is to combine unity with variety. Variety must not be stunted by uniformity, or unity be sundered by conflict.

In each province, then, there would be a provincial government on a democratic basis, not unlike those at present existing. This would control the political or general functions of government. Side by side with this would be a number of guilds, according to the number of communities which felt that they had a distinct cultural heritage to preserve and develop. Their relation to the provincial government would be like that of the fingers to the hand or the limbs to the body. They would be distinct but not separate; individual, but not isolated nor antagonistic. In the Punjab for instance, there would be Hindu, Muslim and Sikh guilds and possibly a Christian one also. Perhaps the Jats would want one, but their case would be better met by a rearrangement of provinces, which would revive the Mogul subahs of Delhi and Agra. In Madras there might be Brahman and non-Brahman guilds, and perhaps also a

COMMUNAL HARMONY

Depressed or Scheduled Caste guild. So the process would go on round the country until each community with an entity of its own could feel that it had the control of its own heritage, the ordering by itself of its own fundamental morality.

Each guild would have an assembly elected by its own members on whatever franchise it determined. An obvious example for the organization of such guilds is the S.G.P.C. of the Sikh community in the Punjab. The change which has come over the relations of the Sikh community with the political government since the passing of the Gurudwara Act is so remarkable that it provides a good augury for extensions of the system. The guild would elect its own officers and would have a double function—administrative and legislative. In the administrative sphere it would control all religious buildings and endowments. It would have the power to impart to schools of its members its own cultural flavour without interfering with the main educational framework. It would provide for religious instruction of its members; it could determine the language of instruction. Language with its related literature lies at the heart of culture; every attempt to denationalize

COMMUNAL HARMONY

a people has been accompanied by an attack on their language. Language is the preservative, and literature the spice, of culture. In this way a vexed question would be taken out of the sphere of political controversy. Once each community felt that its lifeblood (to change the metaphor) could continue to course through its veins without pressings or cauterizings or incisions from without, it would look with quite a different eye upon the question of a common Indian medium of intercourse for all India. This would no longer be a question of a community's existence, to be judged strictly from the communal angle, but one of general welfare.

Besides their administrative powers, the guilds would enjoy legislative authority as well. Personal and private law, as distinct from criminal and commercial and revenue law, would be under their control. They could pass laws in these matters which would be valid for their own members. These laws would be of the same sort as 'measures' of the Assembly of the Church of England, which have the force of law for its ministers, or regulations of the General Medical Council, which are equally binding on doctors. At first this might involve some temporary

COMMUNAL HARMONY

slackening of social progress, since the orthodox everywhere would get full representation; but so soon as the community realized that its future was in its own hands without let or hindrance, so soon the orthodox would no longer be able to raise the cry at every proposal of 'the community in danger'. Progress would mean the evolution of communities, not their disintegration. Ideas from the West are affecting everyone, but they affect different people in different ways. Allow each guild to make what adjustment it thinks right in its own way and the impact of new ideas upon old will cease to involve a painful conflict with constant suspicion of social disintegration. Rather it will promote an ordered and willing development towards a new synthesis of East and West.

Changes affecting communities like the Sikhs or Parsis, or some sections of Hindus like the Nairs who are confined mainly to one province, would be decided by their provincial guild assemblies. But national guild assemblies would also be necessary to represent their communities as a whole. It would be these bodies which would decide upon a change affecting the whole of any community. A measure like that of the Sarda Act, for example, would be dealt with by

COMMUNAL HARMONY

the central or national guilds. The objections to the existing Act both among Muslims and orthodox Hindus, as an alien infringement of their personal law, would be avoided. The vexed problem of the disposal of mosques and tombs, which requires a decision of the whole Muslim community, would be solved in the same way.

There remain a number of problems which these proposals would raise, and some which they would not completely solve. Each one needs a study in itself, and here we can do no more than touch upon them. There is first the question of the relations of the guilds to the political government; how would their interests be safeguarded in the realm of political affairs and power? Then comes the question of Power. How is the army to be composed and by whom is it to be controlled? What is to be the nature of the central government? How is patronage to be controlled? How are economic issues to be dealt with? Lastly, where do the States come into the general scheme? Let us glance at each in turn.

In considering these problems, there will inevitably steal into the mind the magic word, 'safeguards'. But here it may be suggested that

COMMUNAL HARMONY

it is a word every constitution-builder would do well to eliminate from his vocabulary. Safeguards, like modern fortifications, are best kept out of sight. Safeguards aimed at one community, or devised on behalf of one community, are apt to prove public provocations. They are objects of dislike to all the rest, because they smack of favouritism, and every time they are used they increase friction. The fate of the safeguards under the present constitution is an index of the likely fate of all paper guarantees. The best safeguards are those automatic ones which achieve their legitimate purpose without any exceptional action.

The Guild and the State

A way in which the communities *as* communities could be represented politically would be by the institution of second chambers organized upon a communal basis. It is the political organs of the state which control political power in the state. The communities cannot therefore be expected to disinterest themselves completely in this matter, even if they are free to control their cultural affairs in their own way. The lust of power is the mortal sin of collective man. 'All power', said Lord Acton, 'corrupts, and

COMMUNAL HARMONY

absolute power corrupts absolutely.' Each community must have some share of power, but none must have absolute power. Second chambers would be the natural means of achieving the purpose. They could prevent government decisions to the prejudice of particular communities without enabling one community to dominate the rest. As each province would have a legislative assembly based upon general electorates, so it would also have a second chamber representing the component communities in equal numbers. This chamber would review all legislation and any proposal opposed unanimously by the representatives of one guild would not be passed. Apart from this, the majority principle would prevail. In this way the communities as communities would be able to make their views heard in general matters. But they would not be able to veto any proposal unless they were unanimous. Unanimity would only come from a conviction that a legislative measure was really dangerous to the community's existence. Each guild should have equal representation within the second chamber on the same principle that each State in a federation has equal representation, as in the United States. They must be given equal representation to

COMMUNAL HARMONY

emphasize their equal status as partners in the Indian Commonwealth. As in the provinces, so at the centre, a second chamber would be organized with equal representation from all the communities. As in the provinces the provincial guilds would elect the members, so at the centre the national guilds would do likewise, each in their own way and on their own conditions.

Here we may note another difficulty which is sure to be raised. Who is to adjudicate disputes between the guilds and the government as to the sphere of their respective functions? Clearly an arbitral authority is necessary. Here it may be suggested that the Federal Court provides an instrument ready to hand for such a contingency. It is already high and lifted up; it enjoys deep respect; it would only need expansion and adaptation to fulfil this new and important role.

The Army

We pass to the question of power. Who is to control the power of the state, to direct the political Leviathan which every year grows in might if not in majesty? We believe that the institution of guilds, by calming communal fears, would soften the acerbity of the struggle for

COMMUNAL HARMONY

power. But the matter cannot be left to rest there, for if one community gained absolute power, it might overturn in a night all the institutions so laboriously built up. A key-point in the field of power is clearly the army. Its problem has two faces. The ruler of the state is either he who controls the army, or he whom the army controls. The army must therefore not only be subjected to political authority, but be so composed and organized that no one community is tempted, by means of a military *coup d'état*, to seize power on its own behalf. We might first accept as axiomatic that the army should be controlled by the central government. This granted, the following plan for its composition may be suggested.

It is assumed that in a self-governing India British troops would be withdrawn. The total number of the Indian Army (including British) was given by the Simon Report as 210,000. Since then the Burmese contingent of about 4,000 has been withdrawn. We may therefore accept the round figure of 200,000 as that of the standing national Indian army.

The present Indian Army draws 52 per cent of its strength from the Punjab, or if the Gurkhas are included 62 per cent. It may be

COMMUNAL HARMONY

suggested first, that the Punjab (including the Gurkha) contingent, should not be more than one-half of the whole (100,000). The remaining troops would be raised from the other provinces. This would not only raise their self-respect but reduce the possibility of a Punjab military *pronunciamento*. Marathas, Nairs, Rajputs and U.P. Brahmins offer other sources, and if the quality of some of these does not equal that of the frontiersmen, their standard would be sufficient for the purpose. They would have the further advantage of retiring as reservists to the heart of India instead of its borders, where they might at any moment be tempted to join the wrong side in a border war or a serious invasion. In the Punjab itself one half of the force should be Muslim; the Gurkha contingent should remain as at present (20,000) and the remainder would be composed of Sikhs with some Hindus. In the rest of India the proportion should be 65,000 Hindus and 35,000 Muslims. Taking the whole of India, Muslims and Hindus would then be approximately equal in number.

There is the subsidiary question of the admixture of different communities within the regiments themselves. Here the existing practice

COMMUNAL HARMONY

should be followed, i.e. they should be mixed by companies in battalions and regiments.

The Central Executive

The composition of the central executive is closely related to this same problem of power. An executive responsible to a parliamentary majority might easily, though not necessarily, reflect the colour of the communal majority. There remains therefore, the problem of creating confidence in the national executive in the country as a whole. Everyone must feel that the Government of India is *his* government and not the perquisite of any one community or clique. To attain this end it may be suggested that thought should proceed along the line of a business executive on the Swiss model. For legislative purposes (which would not be communal purposes) the drive would come from the parties in the popular chamber, and the check, if any were needed, from the upper chamber. In foreign affairs the upper chamber might have a special voice after the American model. The advocates of policies and programmes would be party leaders; the executors of policy would be men enjoying general respect. They might be elected annually or biennially by both

COMMUNAL HARMONY

Houses sitting together. The system of Proportional Representation for these elections would give representation on the executive to every important group. The Council thus formed would have an annual chairman who would be the President of the Indian Commonwealth. This is not so alien to Indian political practice as might appear at first sight, for Congress practice in the election of the Working Committee and its President has been mainly along these lines. Until the Surat Congress in 1907, and again from the early twenties until last year, the Working Committee has represented all shades of Congress opinion, while the President has been the executant, but not the initiator of Congress policy. The dynamic figures have usually not held the highest office and do not at this moment. The change over from election of the Working Committee to nomination does not really affect the argument, for until 1939 the President was careful to nominate representatives of all shades of opinion to his cabinet. The attempt of Mr Bose last year to turn the President into a Congress Prime Minister was defeated by his opponents' retort that he must in that case also have a homogeneous committee of similar views.

COMMUNAL HARMONY

A related question would be the composition of the Federal Court, whose duties would be of fundamental importance. It would be appointed by the National Executive and the consent of two-thirds of the Upper Chamber would prevent partisan appointments. The Chief Justice might for a time, and even permanently, be a judge appointed by mutual agreement between the Indian and British Governments.

Patronage

This vexed question should be taken out of the hands of the executive as much as possible by means of the existing system of Public Services Commissions and the quota system of appointments according to the numerical strength of the communities. The various commissions would be appointed by the various executives. But in each case, provincial or central, the commissions' appointment would be confirmed by two-thirds majorities in the respective upper chambers.

The States

Where would the States come in? The larger ones would have guild systems on the same model as the rest of India. The small ones

COMMUNAL HARMONY

would have to federate into larger units. The conditions of their federation with the central government would of course depend upon mutual agreement. But it would be better to delay their accession rather than that they should come in immediately either with overloaded concessions and exaggerated safeguards, or with a smarting sense of injustice.

Economic Life

No safeguards are proposed in economic affairs beyond those automatic ones afforded by the second chambers. The proper place for the settlement of economic issues would be the assemblies, central and provincial. On economic issues men think naturally according to their interests, and not according to their communal labels. At present they frequently fail to do so, because their outlook is clouded by communal doubts and fears. By removing the cultural aspects of communal life from the general political stage, the way has been cleared for dealing with economic matters, unhindered by other issues. Thus a scheme of this sort would provide a means of self-expression not only to those who have the cultural welfare of the communities at heart but also for those

COMMUNAL HARMONY

who believe that economic issues are of vital importance and must be dealt with on their own merits. Economic issues will never *override* communal feelings altogether; neither can communal feelings permanently flout economic laws. At present the two sets of issues impede and obstruct one another, so that neither can be settled without friction and conflict. The wheel of each cannot turn because of the grit thrown in by the other. Separate the two from the political axis which connects them, and they can both be lubricated with the oils of reason and patriotism. Then both will soon run both swiftly and easily.

Finally we would summarize the argument in the following propositions:

India is a true *communitas communitatum*, a community of communities, and any organic constitution for the country must grow from this basic soil. The bureaucracy of the past involved the subordination of all the communities to an alien power. Present unitary democratic theory threatens the subordination of the minority communities to the majority in each province and in India as a whole.

Each community exists in its own right and

آخری درج شدہ تاریخ پر یہ کتاب مستعار
لی گئی تھی مقررہ مدت سے زیادہ رکھنے کی
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