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## THE BASIC APPROACH

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*Some five weeks ago, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote a note which was confidentially circulated to a number of friends. Some of those who received it were of opinion that it should have a wider circulation as it dealt with many important problems of the day. At that time he was reluctant to get it published. But he has now agreed that this note might be shared with others. With his permission, therefore, we are publishing it here :*

WE have many grave internal problems to face. But even a consideration of these internal problems inevitably leads to a wider range of thought. Unless we have some clarity of vision or, at any rate, are clear as to the questions posed to us, we shall not get out of the confusion that afflicts the world today. I do not pretend to have that clarity of thinking or to have any answers to our major questions. All I can say, in all humility, is that I am constantly thinking about these questions. In a sense, I might say that I rather envy those who have got fixed ideas and, therefore, need not take the trouble to look deeper into the problems of today. Whether it is from the point of view of some religion or ideology, they are not troubled with the mental conflicts which are always the accompaniment of the great ages of transition.

2. And yet, even though it may be more comfortable to have fixed ideas and be complacent, surely that is not to be commended, and that can only lead to stagnation and decay. The basic fact of today is the tremendous pace of change in human life. In my own life, I have seen amazing changes, and I am sure that, in the course of the life of the next generation, these changes will be even greater, if humanity is not overwhelmed and annihilated by an atomic war.

3. Nothing is so remarkable as the progressive conquest or understanding of the physical world by the mind of man today, and this process is continuing at a terrific pace. Man need no longer be a victim of external circumstances, at any rate, to a very large extent. While there has been this conquest of external conditions, there is at the same time the strange spectacle of a lack of moral fibre and of self-control in man as a whole. Conquering the physical world, he fails to conquer himself.

4. That is the tragic paradox of this Atomic and

Sputnik Age. The fact that nuclear tests continue, even though it is well recognised that they are very harmful in the present and in the future ; the fact that all kinds of weapons of mass destruction are being produced and piled up, even though it is universally recognised that their use may well exterminate the human race, brings out this paradox with startling clarity. Science is advancing far beyond the comprehension of a very great part of the human race, and posing problems which most of us are incapable of understanding, much less of solving. Hence, the inner conflict and tumult of our times. On the one side, there is this great and overpowering progress in science and technology and of their manifold consequences, on the other, a certain mental exhaustion of civilisation itself.

5. Religion comes into conflict with rationalism. The disciplines of religion and social usage fade away without giving place to other disciplines, moral or spiritual. Religion, as practised, either deals with matters rather unrelated to our normal lives and thus adopts an ivory tower attitude, or is allied to certain social usages which do not fit in with the present age. Rationalism, on the other hand, with all its virtues, somehow appears to deal with the surface of things, without uncovering the inner core. Science itself has arrived at a stage when vast new possibilities and mysteries loom ahead. Matter and energy and spirit seem to overlap.

6. In the ancient days, life was simpler and more in contact with nature. Now it becomes more and more complex and more and more hurried, without time for reflection or even of questioning. Scientific developments have produced an enormous surplus of power and energy which are often used for wrong purposes.

7. The old question still faces us, as it has faced humanity for ages past : what is the meaning of life ?

The old days of faith do not appear to be adequate, unless they can answer the questions of today. In a changing world, living should be a continuous adjustment to these changes and happenings. It is the lack of this adjustment that creates conflicts.

8. The old civilisations with the many virtues that they possess, have obviously proved inadequate. The new Western civilisation, with all its triumphs and achievements and also with its atomic bombs, also appears inadequate and, therefore, the feeling grows that there is something wrong with our civilisation. Indeed, essentially our problems are those of civilisation itself. Religion gave a certain moral and spiritual discipline; it also tried to perpetuate superstition and social usages. Indeed, those superstitions and social usages enmeshed and overwhelmed the real spirit of religion. Disillusionment followed. Communism comes in the wake of this disillusionment and offers some kind of faith and some kind of discipline. To some extent it fills a vacuum. It succeeds in some measure by giving a content to man's life. But in spite of its apparent success, it fails, partly because of its rigidity, but, even more so, because it ignores certain essential needs of human nature. There is much talk in Communism of the contradictions of capitalist society and there is truth in that analysis. But we see the growing contradictions within the rigid framework of Communism itself. Its suppression of individual freedom brings about powerful reactions. Its contempt for what might be called the moral and spiritual side of life not only ignores something that is basic in man, but also deprives human behaviour of standards and values. Its unfortunate association with violence encourages a certain evil tendency in human beings.

9. I have the greatest admiration for many of the achievements of the Soviet Union. Among these great achievements is the value attached to the child and the common man. Their systems of education and health are probably the best in the world. But it is said, and rightly, that there is suppression of individual freedom there. And yet the spread of education in all its forms is itself a tremendous liberating force which ultimately will not tolerate that suppression of freedom. This again is another contradiction. Unfortunately, Communism became too closely associated with the necessity for violence and thus the idea which it placed before the world became a tainted one. Means distorted ends. We see here the powerful influence of wrong means and methods.

10. Communism charges the capitalist structure of society with being based on violence and class conflict. I think this is essentially correct, though that capitalist structure itself has undergone and is continually undergoing a change because of democratic and other struggles and inequality. The question is how to get rid of this and have a classless society with equal opportunities for all. Can this be achieved through methods of violence, or can it be possible to bring about those changes through peaceful methods? Communism has definitely allied itself to the approach

of violence. Even if it does not indulge normally in physical violence, its language is of violence, its thought is violent and it does not seek to change by persuasion or peaceful democratic pressures, but by coercion and indeed by destruction and extermination. Fascism has all these evil aspects of violence and extermination in their grossest forms and, at the same time, has no acceptable ideal.

11. This is completely opposed to the peaceful approach which Gandhiji taught us. Communists as well as anti-Communists, both seem to imagine that a principle can only be stoutly defended by language of violence, and by condemning those who do not accept it. For both of them there are no shades, there is only black and white. That is the old approach of the bigoted aspects of some religions. It is not the approach of tolerance of feeling that perhaps others might have some share of the truth also. Speaking for myself, I find this approach wholly unscientific, unreasonable and uncivilised, whether it is applied in the realm of religion or economic theory or anything else. I prefer the old pagan approach of tolerance, apart from its religious aspects. But, whatever we may think about it, we have arrived at a stage in the modern world when an attempt at forcible imposition of ideas on any large section of people is bound ultimately to fail. In present circumstances this will lead to war and tremendous destruction. There will be no victory, only defeat for everyone. Even this, we have seen, in the last year or two, that it is not easy for even great Powers to reintroduce colonial control over territories which have recently become independent. This was exemplified by the Suez incident in 1956. Also what happened in Hungary demonstrated that the desire for national freedom is stronger even than any ideology and cannot ultimately be suppressed. What happened in Hungary was not essentially a conflict between Communism and anti-Communism. It represented nationalism striving for freedom from foreign control.

12. Thus, violence cannot possibly lead today to a solution of any major problem because violence has become much too terrible and destructive. The moral approach to this question has now been powerfully reinforced by the practical aspect.

13. If the society we aim at cannot be brought about by big scale violence, will small scale violence help? Surely not, partly because that itself may lead to the big scale violence and partly because it produces an atmosphere of conflict and of disruption. It is absurd to imagine that out of conflict the social progressive forces are bound to win. In Germany both the Communist Party and the Social Democratic Party were swept away by Hitler. This may well happen in other countries too. In India any appeal to violence is particularly dangerous because of its inherent disruptive character. We have too many fissiparous tendencies for us to take risks. But all these are relatively minor considerations. The basic thing, I believe, is that wrong means will not lead to right results and that is no longer merely an ethical doctrine but a practical proposition.

14. Some of us have been discussing this general background and, more especially, conditions in India. It is often said that there is a sense of frustration and depression in India and the old buoyancy of spirit is not to be found at a time when enthusiasm and hard work are most needed. This is not merely in evidence in our country. It is in a sense a world phenomenon. An old and valued colleague\* said that this is due to our not having a philosophy of life and indeed the world also is suffering from this lack of a philosophical approach. In our efforts to ensure the material prosperity of the country, we have not paid any attention to the spiritual element in human nature. Therefore, in order to give the individual and the nation a sense of purpose, something to live for and, if necessary, to die for, we have to revive some philosophy of life and give, in the wider sense of the word, a spiritual background to our thinking. We talk of a Welfare State and of democracy and socialism. They are good concepts but they hardly convey a clear and unambiguous meaning. This was the argument and then the question arose as to what our ultimate objective should be: Democracy and socialism are means to an end, not the end itself. We talk of the good of society. Is this something apart from and transcending the good of the individuals composing it? If the individual is ignored and sacrificed for what is considered the good of the society, is that the right objective to have?

15. It was agreed that the individual should not be so sacrificed and indeed that real social progress will come only when opportunity is given to the individual to develop, provided the individual is not a selected group, but comprises the whole community. The touchstone, therefore, should be how far any political or social theory enables the individual to rise above his petty self and thus think in terms of the good of all. The law of life should not be competition or acquisitiveness but co-operation, the good of each contributing to the good of all. In such a society the emphasis will be on duties, not on rights; the rights will follow the performance of the duties. We have to give a new direction to education and evolve a new type of humanity.

16. This argument led to the old Vedantic conception that everything, whether sentient or insentient, finds a place in the organic whole; that everything has a spark of what might be called the Divine impulse or the basic energy or life force which pervades the Universe. This leads to metaphysical regions which tend to take us away from the problems of life which face us. I suppose that any line of thought, sufficiently pursued, leads us in some measure to metaphysics. Even science today is almost on the verge of all manner of imponderables. I do not propose to discuss these metaphysical aspects, but this very argument indicates how the mind searches for something basic underlying the physical world. If we really believed in this all-pervading concept of the principle of life, it might help us to get rid of some of our narrowness of race, caste or class and make us

more tolerant and understanding in our approaches to life's problems.

17. But obviously it does not solve any of these problems and, in a sense, we remain where we were. In India we talk of the Welfare State and Socialism. In a sense, every country, whether it is Capitalist, Socialist or Communist, accepts the ideal of the Welfare State. Capitalism, in a few countries at least, has achieved this common welfare to a very large extent, though it has far from solved its own problems and there is a basic lack of something vital. Democracy allied to Capitalism has undoubtedly toned down many of its evils and in fact is different now from what it was a generation or two ago. In industrially advanced countries there has been a continuous and steady upward trend of economic development. Even the terrible losses of World Wars have not prevented this trend, in so far as these highly developed countries are concerned. Further, this economic development has spread, though in varying degrees, to all classes. This does not apply to countries which are not industrially developed. Indeed, in those countries the struggle for development is very difficult and sometimes, in spite of efforts, not only do economic inequalities remain, but tend to become worse. Normally speaking, it may be said that the forces of a capitalist society, if left unchecked, tend to make the rich richer and the poor poorer and thus increase the gap between them. This applies to countries as well as groups or regions or classes within the countries. Various democratic processes interfere with these normal trends. Capitalism itself has, therefore, developed some socialistic features even though its major aspects remain.

18. Socialism, of course, deliberately wants to interfere with the normal processes and thus not only adds to the productive forces but lessens inequalities. But, what is socialism? It is difficult to give a precise answer and there are innumerable definitions of it. Some people probably think of socialism vaguely just as something which does good and which aims at equality. That does not take us very far. Socialism is basically a different approach from that of capitalism, though I think it is true that the wide gap between them tends to lessen because many of the ideas of socialism are gradually incorporated even in the capitalist structure. Socialism is after all not only a way of life but a certain scientific approach to social and economic problems. If socialism is introduced in a backward and under-developed country, it does not suddenly make it any less backward. In fact we then have a backward and poverty-stricken socialism.

19. Unfortunately many of the political aspects of Communism have tended to distort our vision of socialism. Also the technique of struggle evolved by Communism has given violence a predominant part. Socialism should, therefore, be considered apart from these political elements or the inevitability of violence. It tells us that the general character of social, political and intellectual life in a society is governed by its productive resources. As those productive resources

\* The reference is to Dr. Sampurnanand's 'Congress Ideology and Programme', published in the *AICC Economic Review*, dated August 1, 1958, pp. 7-9.

change and develop, so the life and thinking of the community changes.

20. Imperialism or colonialism suppressed and suppresses the progressive social forces. Inevitably it aligns itself with certain privileged groups or classes because it is interested in preserving the social and economic status quo. Even after a country has become independent, it may continue to be economically dependent on other countries. This kind of thing is euphemistically called having close cultural and economic ties.

21. We discuss sometimes the self-sufficiency of the village. This should not be mixed up with the idea of decentralisation though it may be a part of it. While decentralisation is, I think, desirable to the largest possible extent, if it leads to old and rather primitive methods of production, then it simply means that we do not utilise modern methods which have brought great material advance to some countries of the West. That is, we remain poor and, what is more, tend to become poorer because of the pressure of an increasing population. I do not see any way out of our vicious circle of poverty except by utilising the new sources of power which science has placed at our disposal. Being poor, we have no surplus to invest and we sink lower and lower.

22. We have to break through this barrier by profiting by the new sources of power and modern techniques. But, in doing so, we should not forget the basic human element and the fact that our objective is individual improvement and the lessening of inequalities; and we must not forget the ethical and spiritual aspects of life which are ultimately the basis of culture and civilisation and which have given some meaning to life.

23. It has to be remembered that it is not by some magic adoption of socialist or capitalist method that poverty suddenly leads to riches. The only way is through hard work and increasing the productivity of the nation and organising an equitable distribution of its products. It is a lengthy and difficult process. In a poorly developed country, the capitalist method offers no chance. It is only through a planned approach on socialistic lines that steady progress can be attained though even that will take time. As this process continues, the texture of our life and thinking gradually changes.

24. Planning is essential for this because otherwise we waste our resources which are very limited. Planning does not mean a mere collection of projects or schemes, but a thought-out approach of how to strengthen the base and pace of progress so that the community advances on all fronts. In India we have a terrible problem of extreme poverty in certain large regions, apart from the general poverty of the country. We have always a difficult choice before us; whether to concentrate on production by itself in selected and favourable areas, and thus for the moment rather ignoring the poor areas, or try to develop the backward areas at the same time, so as to lessen the inequalities between regions. A balance has to be struck and an integrated national plan evolved.

That national plan need not and indeed should not have rigidity. It need not be based on any dogma; but should rather take the existing facts into consideration. It may and, I think, in present-day India, it should encourage private enterprise in many fields, though even that private enterprise must necessarily fit in with the national plan and have such controls as are considered necessary.

25. Land reforms have a peculiar significance because without them, more especially in a highly congested country like India, there can be no radical improvement in productivity in agriculture. But the main object of land reforms is a deeper one. They are meant to break up the old class structure of a society that is stagnant.

26. We want social security, but we have to recognise that social security only comes when a certain stage of development has been reached. Otherwise we shall have neither social security nor any development.

27. It is clear that, in the final analysis, it is the quality of the human beings that counts. It is man that builds up the wealth of a nation, as well as its cultural progress. Hence education and health are of high importance so as to produce that quality in the human beings. We have to suffer here also from the lack of resources, but still we have always to remember that it is right education and good health that will give the foundation for economic as well as cultural and spiritual progress.

28. A national plan has thus both a short-term objective and a long-term one. The long-term objective gives a true perspective. Without it short-term planning is of little avail and will lead us into blind alleys. Planning will thus always be perspective planning and hard in view of the physical achievements for which we strive. In other words, it has to be physical planning, though it is obviously limited and conditioned by financial resources and economic conditions.

29. The problems that India faces are to some extent common to other countries, but much more so, there are new problems for which we have not got parallels or historical precedents elsewhere. What has happened in the past in the industrially advanced countries has little bearing on us today. As a matter of fact, the countries that are advanced today were economically better off than India today, in terms of per capita income, before their industrialisation began. Western economics, therefore, though helpful, have little bearing on our present-day problems. So also have Marxist economics which are in many ways out of date, even though they throw a considerable light on economic processes. We have thus to do our own thinking, profiting by the example of others, but essentially trying to find a path for ourselves suited to our own conditions.

30. In considering these economic aspects of our problems, we have always to remember the basic approach of peaceful means; and perhaps we might also keep in view the old Vedantic ideal of the life force which is the inner base of everything that exists.