Where is the Intelligentsia Today?

Some leaders have of late lamented upon the callousness of intellectuals at this hour of national crisis. The lawyers, the physicians, the journalists, the teachers, and the professors were the vanguard of our nationalist movement against the imperialists only a century ago. They sacrificed their career to confront and even courted prison. Some of them are still alive and active. Yet, when their beloved country is plunging headlong into chaos and misery by corruption and eroding the core of national life, when prices of consumer goods go spiraling daily and drive millions to starvation and death, when inefficiency and irresponsibility turn the public administration into an object of popular ridicule, when, to be short, the nation is collapsing in all its limbs and vitals, the intellectuals look on unconcerned and indifferent. Their conduct looks lamentable and unpardonable. But, the critics, as reasonable men should try to analyze the reason thereof rather than be satisfied by putting the blame on the inert.

In a class based society, the masses living below poverty line are herds of human being who lead an animal life: though they feel the pinch, they either reconcile themselves to their lot as part of their destiny and fall in line with the social order, or burst into sporadic revolts that the ruling class takes no time to quench and quell. The privileged class rolls in comfort and feels no need to revolutionize the social order. It is the middle class living slightly above the poverty level that has produced philosophers and thinkers, poets and painters, writers and social reformers. It is no accident that Voltaire, Lincoln and Gandhi, not to name a host more, come from this class.

The Middle class

The middle class produces an intelligentsia, because the class lives above the basic needs and has time and means to read, think, write and address

people and organize them for a better order of society. They therefore became the natural leaders of the masses both in evolution and revolution. This has been inevitable according to its class character in all ages. In the national movement for India's independence the intelligentsia naturally therefore stood at the forefront of the struggle.

The forces to which the imperialists peacefully handed over power were not for the deliverance of the masses from their age old oppression and exploitation. The joint front of Congress had urged against the common enemy and carried diverse elements in its rank with different and even conflicting objectives. The forces that seized power were Indians thirsty for power, pomp and position that British used to enjoy and had joined hands with the masses only to replace the foreigners and usurp the "gaddi" (throne).

This is borne out by Abdul Kalam Azad's autobiography where he refers to Pt Nehru's betrayal of Mahatmaji at the crucial hour of negotiation for transfer of power. Gandhiji had no illusions about the much-trumpeted independence. On the 15th of August 1947 itself, he expressed his view - "Let others rejoice, let me alone shed my tears." Thereafter he made offers to remove the illusion of the masses about the independence achieved by systematically criticizing in his evening prayer meeting the political and social setup the erstwhile national leaders were out to build. "This is not the Ramarajya I was dreaming of", he pronounced clearly and unequivocally before he was silenced by political murder.

The brown bureaucrats who stepped into the shoes of imperialists were not slow to see the potential danger that the middle class posed for them. They had the green memory of the national struggle before them where the intelligentsia had championed the cause of masses. So they were keen in liquidating the middle class in pushing them below the poverty line. To achieve this, they adopted various methods, diverse in forms but singular in purpose. Inflation was resorted to on the insistence of Pt. Nehru throwing overboard the seasoned and expert advice of Deshmukh.

Pt. Nehru publicly encouraged corruption in the name of democracy,

downgrading up-right men in public administration and in public life. He stoutly defended nepotism and favoritism, as a result honest elements in society, in administration and outside, stood eclipsed. In the name of adult franchise, the intelligentsia was reduced to a negligible fraction in body politics. It ceased to yield effective influence in the matter of electing representatives to the parliament and legislature. Politically and socially, the intelligentsia was turned into a nonentity. Persons with conscience (e.g John Mathai, Setalvad and Changla) were systematically shaken off to make room for convent personalities.

The ruling party assiduously attempted to establish a social norm hostile to that of the working class. A professor burning the midnight candle is slighted while one busying himself in electioneering for their ruling party is given recognition and boosted up. This has resulted in a brain drain of many scholars from India who have sought shelter in U.S.A or elsewhere.The honest intellectual workers who could not flee this country lead a frustrated and disgruntled life. The freethinker and the righteous ones have now no places in society.

The ruling party has been successful in building up a committed executive and makes an all out drive for a committed judiciary and a committed press.

(Written during Emergency Rule in India: 1975-77.)