

THE SOCIALIST TRADITION  
IN  
THE MAHABHARATA

ADHARCHANDRA MUKHERJEE LECTURE  
delivered in the University of Calcutta on  
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## THE SOCIALIST TRADITION IN THE MAHABHARATA\*

The *Mahabharata* is indeed an encyclopaedia of ancient Indian thought and cultural traditions. It may be called the great watershed of the thought-movements of ancient India. Different streams of thought and varying cultural traditions converged upon this basin and they again formed the source and inspiration of new streams. The *Mahabharata* sums up and passes on to future generations the cultural values of the ages that went before.

It has been said by a great thinker that nothing is more fatal than turning history into idolatry. History and tradition have their importance, but one should not forget that the experience of ages may instruct and warn, but cannot guide or control. "By the hypothesis of progress," says Lord Acton, "the new is always gaining on the old; history is the embodiment of imperfection, and escape from history became the watchword of the coming day." In the history of human institutions, therefore, the great question is to discover not what men prescribe but what they ought to prescribe. For, as Lord Acton has said once more, "No prescription is valid against the conscience of mankind."

Tradition, however, does not exactly fall within the four corners of prescription. It represents the prevailing temper and outlook of an age in regard to its manifold problems. Faith is the most important element in tradition and the power of a tradition to endure depends upon its capacity to command a continuing faith; and this, in its turn, depends upon its power to evoke hope and exhilaration from the people. Otherwise the tradition loses its flow and reaches a dead end. Tradition, therefore, in the sense of a continuing faith plays a vital role in human affairs and it shapes imperceptibly but effectively human institutions.

The idea of Socialism in India, as in other countries of the world, made its appearance in certain conditions of social constitution. The origin of this idea may be traced to two things: the indefensible character of privilege, on the one hand, and the immense disparity between the rich and the poor with all its attendant miseries. The great epic of India, the *Mahabharata*, lays particular emphasis upon both these

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social dangers and, page after page, draws our attention to the necessity of vigilance in regard to these dangers. From the dawn of human civilization, civilized humanity has been conscious about the problem of poverty. Human consciousness, however, in this respect, has found different expressions and forms in different countries. The problem of poverty in the *Mahabharata* undoubtedly is one of its greatest and noblest themes. The sensitiveness, ardour and moral earnestness with which the great author of the epic has discussed this subject are perhaps unrivalled in the whole range of world's literature.

The author of the epic is never tired of emphasising the duties and obligations of the state towards the citizens. It is the constant injunction of the epic that all the people in the state, without any distinction whatsoever, should be made to feel that they were living under the paternal care of the king or the head of the state.

पुत्रा इव पितुर्गृहे विषये यस्य मानवाः ।

निर्भया विचरिष्यन्ति स राजा राजसत्तमः ॥

(*Mahabharata, Santi Parvan*)

Conditions of good life for all persons in the state should be created by the king, for he is the dispenser of justice and the architect of the destiny of the people in his kingdom. There was no such thing as inexorable fate or a predestined lot for his subject. The King ordains what is good as well as what is evil. He is, in fact, the epoch-maker. and different epochs in human history are the results of state endeavour.

राजा कृतयुगस्त्रष्टा त्रेतायाः द्वापरस्य च ।

युगस्य तु चतुर्थस्य राजा भवति कारणम् ॥

(*Mahabharata, Santi Parvan*)

Such being the case, it was the bounden duty of the king to regard his subjects as his own children and to promote their happiness in every possible manner. Such a king is worthy of the highest honour, and of the best traditions of his office. Ideas akin to state socialism were inculcated by sage Narada when he appeared before the court of Yudhisthira at Indraprastha (modern Delhi) just after his enthronement there. In the *Shabha Parvan* of the great epic, which is its second canto, Narada quite pertinently asked the newly enthroned king Yudhisthira, if all the blind, deaf, mute, maimed or otherwise physically disabled persons as well as homeless refugees in his kingdom were being carefully looked after and protected by the state.

क्वचित् अन्धांश्च मूकांश्च पङ्गून् व्यङ्गानवान्भवान् ।  
पितेव पासि धर्मज्ञ तथा प्रव्रजितानपि ॥

(*Shabha Parvan*, Ch. V, Sl. 123)

We have abundant evidence in the *Mahabharata* to show that this ideal of the obligation of the state towards the helpless citizens in particular, was ever present before monarchs and statesmen. In the *Virata Parvan*, Arjuna lays special emphasis on this aspect of Yudhisthira's statecraft. He proclaims before the whole assembly of the Matsya Court, in no uncertain voice, that Yudhisthira, as king, completely fulfilled his kingly duties by maintaining, like his children, all the old, infirm, disabled, poor and helpless persons in the state.

एष वृद्धाननार्थांश्च पङ्गून् व्यङ्गानवान्भवान् ।  
पितेव पालयामास प्रजाधर्म्येण वै विभुः ॥

(*Virata Parvan*, Ch. XVII, Sl. 24)

The *Aranyaka Parvan* of the great epic has a special merit of its own. It is a vast storehouse of ancient Indian historical lore and traditions. Ideas of social and economic justice are prominently expressed in some of its chapters. One such chapter describes an interview between a very old sage, named *Baka*, who is reported to have lived for thousands of years, and *Indra*, the King of the Gods in Heaven. It is rather striking that *Indra* who was the Protector of the Divine Order in Heaven should approach *Baka*, who, after all, was a resident of the earth, for instruction and guidance in regard to a just and equitable social order. *Indra's* question was formed in a very pointed manner. He asked what was the most poignant sorrow experienced by persons living throughout the ages in this world.

शतं वर्षसहस्राणि मुने जातस्य तेऽनघ ।  
समाख्याहि मम ब्रह्मन् किं दुःखं चिरजीविनाम् ॥

(*Aranyaka Parvan*, p. 1069)

*Baka* at once replied by narrating his sorrow. He said that a man without means is always despised and the poor are always insulted by the rich and, above all, the ignorant and the stupid flourish and prosper, whereas the learned and the wise suffer and decline.

नान्यत् दुःखतरं किञ्चित् लोकेषु प्रतिभाति मे ।  
अर्थैर्विहीनः पुरुषः परैः सम्यग्भिभूयते ॥  
आढ्यैः दरिद्राः अवमताः किं नु दुःखतरं ततः ।  
लोके वैधर्म्यमेतत् तु दृश्यते बहुविस्तरम् ॥

हीनज्ञानाश्च हृथ्यन्ते क्लिश्यन्ते प्राज्ञकोविदाः ।

वहुदुःखपरिक्षेशं मानुषमिह दृश्यते ॥

(*Aranyaka Parvan*, p. 1069)

This is the considered utterance of a sage embodying the distilled experience of thousands of years. He has no hesitation in describing these miseries as **मानुषम्**, i.e., man-made. Quite naturally, he feels from the bottom of his heart the poignancy of the situation and complains what man has made of man. A tragedy of greater magnitude than this cannot be conceived of :

नान्यत् दुःखतरं किञ्चित् लोकेषु प्रतिभाति मे ।

The unworthy are at the top, or at the helm of affairs, whereas patient merit silently suffers and languishes.

Towards the end of the *Aranyaka Parvan* we have another episode. This time *Dharma*, being personified, appears before Yudhishthira, and in order to test his character and integrity asks him certain important questions. One of these questions was in regard to the definition of the death of a person in this world.

मृतः कथं स्यात् पुरुषः ?

*How does a person become dead?*

At once came the unhesitating reply from the lips of Yudhishthira :

मृतो दरिद्रः पुरुषः ।

*A person who is poor is dead.*

This episode throws a flood of light on the attitude and outlook of the author of the epic towards the curse of poverty. The interview described here is between *Dharma* himself and Yudhishthira who was *Dharmaputra* or the *Son of Dharma*. Thereby the epic unmistakably suggests that poverty is death and there cannot be a more heinous social crime than the toleration of poverty in social constitution.

Such an attitude towards poverty is emphasised in eloquent terms in the *Udyoga Parvan* of the *Mahabharata*. This canto describes the preparations for the great Kurukshetra War. On the eve of the outbreak of the war, *Shree Krishna* was sent as a special ambassador to the court of *Duryodhana* with definite instructions to arrive at an amicable settlement of the disputes, if possible. The issues were clear-cut and the most fundamental of these issues was the unbearable poverty under which the Pandavas were suffering. Yudhishthira who throughout the epic has been represented as the very embodiment of *Dharma* (विग्रहवान् धर्मः) gave the final instructions to *Shree Krishna* on

the eve of his historic journey to the Kuru Court. On one issue he was not prepared to make any compromise, and that issue was poverty. In pathetic terms Yudhisthira narrated his tale of sorrow. He could not provide food for his mother and other near relations, and yet he was to think of peace!

इतो दुःखतरं किन्नु यदहं मातरं ततः ।  
संविधातुं न शक्नोमि मित्राणां वा जनाह्नन ॥

(*Udyoga Parvan*, p. 302)

This attitude of Yudhisthira was strictly in conformity with the ancient Indian tradition regarding poverty. He could point out correctly that the ancient Indian sage *Sambara* considered poverty to be definitely a crime. A condition in which there is no prospect of a meal for a human being either today or tomorrow is most sinful and intolerable. Perhaps the sin lies in doing nothing to avert such a calamity.

नातः पापीयसीं काञ्चिदवस्थां शम्बरोऽब्रवीत् ।  
यत्र नैवाद्य न प्रातर्भोजनं प्रतिदृश्यते ॥

(*Udyoga Parvan*, p. 303)

The value of this statement consists in its conformity with ancient Indian socio-economic traditions. In the same breath, Yudhisthira asserted that the ancient Indian sages proclaimed wealth to be the foundation of earthly existence and the object to be most desired. It was found from the experience of ages that persons with means did truly live, while the poor and the destitute were dead even when alive.

धनमाहुः परं धन्यं धने सर्व्वं प्रतिष्ठितम् ।  
जीवन्ति धनिनो लोके मृता ये त्वधना नराः ॥

(*Udyoga Parvan*, p. 303)

This misfortune is even more tragic than death because life becomes absolutely meaningless for a person as soon as he loses his wealth and the means of subsistence.

आपदेवास्य मरणात् पुरुषस्य गरीयसी ।  
श्रियो विनाशस्तद्व्यस्य निमित्तं धर्मकामयोः ॥

(*Udyoga Parvan*, p. 302)

The *Bhagabad-Gita* or the Lord's Song in the *Bhisma Parvan* of the *Mahabharata* is rightly regarded as the embodiment of the highest wisdom, supreme philosophy and the greatest ethical consciousness of the Hindus. The essence of its teachings consists in the practical discipline that it inculcates. It is primarily a *Yoga Shastra*—a book

of practical maxims. Throughout the book emphasis is laid on *Karma*—or the method of work. Life is work and without work life cannot be sustained. It is further pointed out that all work is to be performed in a spirit of sacrifice, for the sake of the Divine, that is, for the sake of the created world which is the manifestation of the Divine. *Loka-Sangraha* (लोकसंग्रहः) or world maintenance is the most important principle of *Karma*, and work that does not promote the welfare and happiness of mankind is to be eschewed. The whole of creation embodies the spirit of a co-operative commonwealth in which the duty of every component unit is to further the interest of the whole. Underlying the structure of the universe is sympathy which compels my good to be involved in the good of others. Out of it is born justice, the main pillar of society. A person who partakes of the benefits of this commonwealth and yet does not contribute his mite towards the maintenance of others is verily a thief.

तैर्दानप्रदायैभ्यो यो मुङ्क्ते स्तेन एव सः ।

(Gita, Ch. III, Sl. 12)

The underlying idea seems to be that a man who has sufficiency and yet seeks to obtain more than he needs and deprives others of their due is to be regarded as an exploiter. To put the whole wealth of society at the disposition of the people is to assure the maximum of virtue, justice and happiness. This tradition finds an echo in the *Bhagabata Purana* of a later date. There the author is even more explicit and more emphatic in his pronouncement. A person who seeks to obtain more than he needs is a thief and he deserves punishment. In other words, the author of the *Bhagabata Purana* tried to envisage a social order in which equality of wealth and opportunity was to be the supreme consideration, and any individual trying to disturb this egalitarian order was to be punished. The constant injunction was: "Choose equality and flee greed." It was the duty of the state as the guardian of society to intervene and actively punish wrong-doers.

यावद् भ्रियेत जठरं तावत् सखं हि देहिनाम् ।

अधिकं योऽभिमन्येत स स्तेनो दण्डमर्हति ॥

(*Bhagabata Purana*, Ch. VII, 14, 8.)

The attitude towards poverty and other social problems we have been considering so long is open to a certain criticism. We may hesitate to call it definitely socialist, for two reasons. In the first place, it is a purely moral criticism. It is merely denunciation of greed and

social injustice. In the second place, the approach is diagnostic rather than reconstructive. There is very little evidence of any positive or concrete plan for the reconstruction of the social order. Reform, and not revolution, is the essential tenor of these teachings in the *Mahabharata*. The author of the great epic seems to be in search of a new moral foundation for a better organised society. Transition to an egalitarian order is to be brought about by the conversion of men's hearts to better ways. The recommendation is to reconcile individual ambition with social good. The injunction even is that a man must lose the whole world to gain his own soul. But we may not be far wrong if we characterize this attitude as Utopian Socialism. What socialism there is, is small in volume and, judged by modern standards, is somewhat weak in expression. There are socialist ideas but no socialist plan. There is an ideal but not a method. The object undoubtedly is very laudable; it is the realisation of the common happiness through the rule of equality. The epic sought to create social consciousness for social and economic justice but the difficulty was that these socialist ideas were simply moral theories which lived in a vacuum and had no chance of effective realisation.

The *Anushasana Parvan* of the *Mahabharata*, however, clearly sees the fallacies of a *laissez-faire* state and attempts to suggest a programme or a constructive plan to mitigate the rigours and hardships of an unjust social order. It condemns the drift towards *laissez-faire*. The *Anushasana* or clear injunction of Bhishma to Yudhishthira was that the means of subsistence of the old, the minors, the blind and the destitute in the kingdom should be particularly safeguarded. The principle of taxation should be humanised. The king must not extort taxes from those who are sorely distressed. Honest and upright men should be saved from the pangs of hunger. What can be more criminal for a country than to have within its bounds starving children looking on, while others enjoy delicious dishes?

येषां खादूनि भोज्यानि समवेक्षन्ति बालका ।

नाश्नन्ति विधिवत्तानि किं नु पापतरं ततः ॥

The expression *विधिवत्* undoubtedly suggests that the starving children have a right to these dishes and this right ought to be recognised.

Learned men cannot properly take care of themselves. They should be made free from hunger and want. Let it not happen that "Chill penury repressed their noble rage". Such repression is tantamount, in its enormity, to the crime of throttling an embryo in the womb—nipping in the bud immense possibilities the fruition of which might

be beneficial to the country as a whole. Women, being helpless, suffer most. The state should be particularly vigilant in regard to their protection. If they are oppressed or in any way dishonoured, then the future of the state is doomed. Bhisma pointedly inculcates the doctrine that the king who does not protect (अरक्षितारं) but, on the other hand, snatches away the wealth of his subjects (हर्तारं), who violates the time-honoured and established traditions of the country (विलोमारं) and who also fails to show the qualities of right and proper leadership (अनायकं) and is yet unashamed, is a disgrace to his royal office. Such a king is *Kali* incarnate and should be put to death by his subjects acting in an organised manner.

तं वै राजकलिं हन्युः

प्रजाः सन्नह्य निर्घृणम् ॥

Bhisma is not satisfied by merely emphasising the necessity of killing an unworthy king. He goes further and proclaims that the king who takes upon himself the role of a protector and does not protect should be slaughtered like a mad and diseased dog.

अहं वै रक्षित्युक्त्वा यो न रक्षति भूमिपः ।

स संहत्य निहन्तव्यः श्वेव सोन्माद आतुरः ॥

Virtues and vices of the people in general in a state are the results of the king's administration, and the king is responsible for the growth of virtues as well as for the prevalence of the vices.

राजा कालस्य कारणम् ।

The king makes epochs and the different epochs of human history are the results of state endeavour.

राजा कृतयुगस्रष्टा वेतायाः द्वापरस्य च ।

युगस्य च चतुर्थस्य राजा भवति कारणम् ॥

Such being the case, it is the first and foremost duty of the king to provide for a just social order; it is his principal obligation to make the state the moral guardian of society and to promote the happiness of the people in general in every possible manner.

वृद्धबालधनं रक्ष्यमन्धस्य कृपणस्य च ।

न खातपूर्व्वं कुर्व्वीत न रुदन्तीधनं हरित् ॥

क्षतं कृपणवित्तं हि राष्ट्रं हन्ति नृपश्रियम् ।

दद्यात् पशतो भोगान् क्षुद्भयं प्रनुदेत् सताम् ॥

येषां स्वादूनि भोज्यानि समवेक्ष्यन्ति बालकाः ।  
 नाश्रन्ति विधिवत्तानि किंनु पापतरं ततः ॥  
 यदि ते तादृशो राष्ट्रे विद्वान् सीदेत् क्षुधा द्विजः ।  
 भूणहत्याञ्च गच्छेथाः कृत्वा पापमिवोत्तमम् ॥  
 धिक् तस्य जिवितं राज्ञो राष्ट्रे यस्यावसीदति ।  
 द्विजोऽन्यो वा मनुष्योऽपि शिविराहो वचो यथा ॥  
 यस्य स्म विषये राज्ञः स्नातकः सीदति क्षुधा ।  
 आहृष्टमिति तद्राष्ट्रं विन्दते सह राजकम् ॥  
 क्रोशन्त्यो यस्य वै राष्ट्राद् द्विज्यन्ते तरसा स्त्रियः ।  
 क्रोशतां पतिपुत्राणां मृतोऽसौ न च जीवति ॥  
 अरक्षितारं हर्तारं विलोभारं अनायकम् ।  
 तं वै राजकलिं हतुः प्रजाः सन्नह्य निर्घृणम् ॥  
 अहं वै रक्षितेतुक्त्वा यो न रक्षति भूमिपः ।  
 स संहत्य निहन्तव्यः श्वेव सोन्माद आतुरः ॥

(Anushasana Parvan)

The ethical philosophy and injunctions of the *Santi Parvan* and *Anushasana Parvan* of the great epic no doubt clearly envisaged an ideal of social justice to be realized by all possible means. But in spite of their constant emphasis on the aims and objects to be attained, they did not clearly suggest a *methodology* of revolutionary socialism, at least in its large outline. A definite innovation in method was necessary for giving a tangible shape or concrete embodiment to the doctrines enunciated. This new approach we come across in some of the chapters of the *Apaddharma Parvan* of the great epic. The name *Apaddharma* itself suggests that the state, or the community at large, might adopt certain revolutionary measures or introduce revolutionary social or economic innovations in order to alleviate the sufferings of the people in times of crisis or grave social emergency.

A definite innovation in method is thus of decisive importance in the socialist tradition. Some means had to be found, some method had to be devised, some plan had to be evolved by which the whole wealth of society could be put at the disposition of the people to assure the maximum of virtue, justice and happiness. The *Apaddharma Parvan* of the *Mahabharata* gives clear, unambiguous and emphatic utterance to some of the revolutionary principles of socialism. Moral order depended upon justice, and if justice were not allowed to function, then the future of society would be doomed. "Justice is a power,"

सर्वोपायैराददीत धनं यन्नपरयोजनम् ।

सर्वं साध्वर्थमेवेदं असाध्वर्थं न किञ्चन ॥

असाधुभ्योऽर्थमादाय साधुभ्यो यः प्रयच्छति ।

आत्मानं संक्रमं कृत्वा कृत्स्नधर्मविदेव सः ॥

In agriculture, the seed produces the food ( वीजिन भक्तं सम्पाद्यम् ) ; in statecraft, the order is reversed. The people must live first, then only can they be of assistance to the community as a whole. Food is the prime necessity, and food is the basis of continuity and progress. The questions mooted here have reference to a time of distress and degeneration. So the abstract rule of right is bound to be modified by exigencies of practical experience and practical consideration. When times are out of joint, weaker souls seek refuge in the more despondent type of *Bhakti* ( भक्ति ) or surrender to the divine will. But the *Mahabharata* does not encourage this attitude of helplessness. The principle laid down is the welfare of the entire community or of the society as a whole. The final decision is to be reached by an appeal to reason, and judgment. While *Dharma* or moral law is the foundation of the State, the Exchequer is its *sine qua non*. Mere high-sounding principles, if not backed by the exchequer, can only end in confusion and futility.

Therefore, the exchequer should be made full for the purpose of helping the poor and the helpless. Any repression or suffering involved in this process is not to be taken into account. For the good of the people, for social well-being, for true social welfare, even oppression of the rich is justified. The injunction is to extort money by all means because money is necessary for social welfare. The final dictum is that the resources of the world are for the good people and not for dishonest persons who misappropriate everything to themselves. *Dharma*, understood as a whole, means that the dishonest rich should be expropriated and their wealth should be the means for the subsistence of the people suffering from honest poverty. These are, in short, the recommendations of the *Apaddharma Parvan* of the Great Epic in times of distress and difficulties.

Revolutions occur in human history as the result of social maladjustment and the indefensible character of privilege and vested interests in social constitution. When remedies are not found or provided for manifest social injustice and social wrongs, social upheaval is bound to follow. Bhishma warns Yudhisthira in memorable and powerful passages in the *Santi Parvan* that *Rudra* or the God of

says a great writer, "and if it cannot create, it will at least destroy. So that the question for the future is not, shall there be a revolution, but shall it be beneficent or disastrous?" The *Apaddharma* measures aim at preventing a disastrous revolution by making arrangements for justice in social constitution. There is the stern warning that if the weak and the helpless were not properly protected, or if they were oppressed or repressed by the State, then a calamity was bound to happen. The injunction is to take all possible measures for the protection of the weak and the helpless. The epic says: "Most unbearable are the eyes of the weak, as are the eyes of the hermit and the venomous viper. Hence do not oppress the weak. See that the weak are never slighted. Let not the eyes of the weak burn to ashes you and your kith and kin. On a society struck down by the flaming looks of the weak descends the curse of barrenness. It is destroyed to its very roots. Hence do not oppress the weak."

दुर्वलस्य हि यच्चक्षुर्मनेराशीविषस्य च ।  
 अविषह्यतमं मन्ये मा स्म दुर्वलमासदः ॥  
 दुर्वलांस्तात बुध्येथा नित्यमेवाविमानितान् ।  
 मा त्वां दुर्वलचक्षुषि प्रदहेयुः सवान्धवम् ॥  
 न हि दुर्वलदग्धस्य कुले किञ्चित् प्ररोहति ।  
 आमूलं निर्दहत्येव मा स्म दुर्वलमासदः ॥

All this is typical of an outlook in days of agony and acute social distress. Forced gifts, forced loans, confiscation of property and the public control of food supply are advocated, because the urgency of the situation is too great for measures of conciliation to be desirable. Benevolences would be utterly inadequate. Some of the chapters of the *Apaddharma Parvan* propound revolutionary canons of emergency taxation. These lines quite see definitely in the rich and the comfortable the deliberate enemies of the poor, who do not hesitate to take advantage of public misery for private profit.

वीजं भक्तेन सम्पाद्यमिति धर्मविदो विदुः ।  
 अत्रैत् शम्बरस्याहुः महामायस्य दर्शनम् ॥  
 आददीत विशिष्टेभ्यो नावसीदित् कथञ्चन ।  
 तदर्थं पीडयित्वा च न दोषं प्राप्तुमर्हति ॥  
 अकार्यमपि यच्चार्थं क्रियते यच्चकर्मसु ।  
 एतस्मात् कारणात् राजा न दोषं प्राप्तुमर्हति ॥

सर्वोपायैराददीत धनं यज्ञप्रयोजनम् ।

सर्वं साध्वर्थमेवेदं असाध्वर्थं न किञ्चन ॥

असाधुभ्योऽर्थमादाय साधुभ्यो यः प्रयच्छति ।

आत्मानं संक्रमं कृत्वा कृत्स्नधर्मविदेव सः ॥

In agriculture, the seed produces the food ( वीजिन भक्तं सम्पाद्यम् ) ; in statecraft, the order is reversed. The people must live first, then only can they be of assistance to the community as a whole. Food is the prime necessity, and food is the basis of continuity and progress. The questions mooted here have reference to a time of distress and degeneration. So the abstract rule of right is bound to be modified by exigencies of practical experience and practical consideration. When times are out of joint, weaker souls seek refuge in the more despondent type of *Bhakti* ( भक्ति ) or surrender to the divine will. But the *Mahabharata* does not encourage this attitude of helplessness. The principle laid down is the welfare of the entire community or of the society as a whole. The final decision is to be reached by an appeal to reason, and judgment. While *Dharma* or moral law is the foundation of the State, the Exchequer is its *sine qua non*. Mere high-sounding principles, if not backed by the exchequer, can only end in confusion and futility.

Therefore, the exchequer should be made full for the purpose of helping the poor and the helpless. Any repression or suffering involved in this process is not to be taken into account. For the good of the people, for social well-being, for true social welfare, even oppression of the rich is justified. The injunction is to extort money by all means because money is necessary for social welfare. The final dictum is that the resources of the world are for the good people and not for dishonest persons who misappropriate everything to themselves. *Dharma*, understood as a whole, means that the dishonest rich should be expropriated and their wealth should be the means for the subsistence of the people suffering from honest poverty. These are, in short, the recommendations of the *Apaddharma Parvan* of the Great Epic in times of distress and difficulties.

Revolutions occur in human history as the result of social maladjustment and the indefensible character of privilege and vested interests in social constitution. When remedies are not found or provided for manifest social injustice and social wrongs, social upheaval is bound to follow. Bhishma warns Yudhishthira in memorable and powerful passages in the *Santi Parvan* that *Rudra* or the God of

Destruction takes his birth in such conditions of intolerable social suffering. It is the sin of men that is responsible for the advent of *Rudra*; he does not descend from heaven or from any unknown quarter of the earth. His appearance can be surmised or predicted, although his advent is of the nature of a terrible whirlwind, or of a sudden conflagration, or of the bursting of the cloud with the thunder-bolt. *Rudra* then does not discriminate between the honest and the dishonest—between the good and the bad. Dishonest persons are punished for their crimes, and so-called honest men suffer, perhaps for their silence, for their failure to speak out, for their acquiescence in the prevailing social disorder. *Rudra* now becomes a heavy steam-roller which crushes ruthlessly human beings in all disastrous revolutions. The clear, unambiguous and emphatic verdict of the *Mahabharata* is :

पापैः पापे क्रियमाणेऽतिविलम्  
 ततो रुद्रो जायते देव एषः ।  
 पापैः पापा संजनयन्ति रुद्रम्  
 ततः सर्वान् साध्वसाधून् हिनस्ति ॥  
 आत्मा रुद्रो हृदये मानवानाम्  
 स्वं स्वं देहं परदेहं च हन्ति ।  
 वातोत्पातैः सदृशम् रुद्रमाहुः  
 दार्वैर्जीमूतैः सदृशम् रूपमस्य ॥

*Rudra* is, therefore, man-made. He has his origin in the hearts of men (आत्मा रुद्रो हृदये मानवानाम्). His role as a destroyer becomes possible only because of the sins of men (पापैः पापे क्रियमाणेऽतिविलम्). Disaster can only be averted by creating conditions of good life for all in society, by healing measures, and finally by evolving a socialistic pattern of society. This is, in sum and substance, the socialist tradition in the *Mahabharata*.

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