

A statement on Scientific Temper signed by outstanding intellectuals, released by P.N. Haksar at the Nehru Centre in Bombay (*Mainstream*, July 25, 1981) has touched off rethinking in a broad spectrum of our national life. Eight comments on the Statement have so far been published in *Mainstream* (August 29, October 10, November 14 and December 19, 1981 and January 2 and 16 1982). We publish here an important contribution from Dr Gregorios, who is the Metropolitan of Delhi and the North, Orthodox Syrian Church of the East. — Editor

## Time for a Resume before the debate Resumes?

PAUL GREGORIOS

WHY don't people give credit where it is due? If Ashis Nandy had not hit back in horrid overstatement at the Scientists' Manifesto (*Statement on Scientific Temper*) who besides a few connoisseurs would have paid any attention to it?

The debate has now gone on for full six months; a resume of the discussion so far is overdue before we go much farther. Let us start with Prof. K.V. Subbaram (*Mainstream* January 16, 1982) who stated that Ashis Nandy (*Mainstream* 10, 1981) obviously missed the main point of the Statement on Scientific Temper (SST). This seems true. The Statement was directed against a phenomenon that frightens many thinking people — the growth of irrationality or retreat from reason, manifested in the recrudescence and popularity of religious practices (superstitions and bizarre rituals) incompatible with a rational world-view. And the consequence is that with the world's third largest trained man-power in Science and Technology we are unable to solve the basic problems of the Indian people — mainly poverty, inequality, ignorance, ill-health, and general backwardness, with a tendency to glorify the past by creating a false one. The authors and signatories of SST argue that all of us, not just scientists, but including teachers and media people, should undertake a rational scientific analysis of the social barriers that have to be broken in order to move ahead.

If that is the main thesis of the SST, then Ashis Nandy's powerful invective has hardly scratched its surface. Nor does the effort of Boudhayan Chattopadhyaya and Rajendra Prasad to castigate the SST and the Counter Statement on Humanistic Temper on purely ideological grounds carry much conviction.

Apart from intemperate language Ashis Nandy makes two points:

(a) Human dignity and welfare are more impor-

tant than the scientific temper in itself.

(b) Any evaluation of the scientific temper must depend on the criterion of how it contributes to human dignity and welfare.

I do not see how the authors of the SST can quarrel with that either.

Of course the SST does not say that the Scientific Temper will solve all human problems and will promote human dignity and welfare. But it does take the view that it is the prevalence of superstition, bizarre ritual and obscurantist social customs in an atmosphere of conformity, credulity and unquestioning obedience to authority, that constitutes the main obstacle to the advance of the scientific temper. The statement makes a case for such a view by arguing that "obscurantism and irrationalism practised by a hierarchy of authorities has the predictable effect of reinforcing retreat from reason". And so it places us before a choice: "We either overcome the obstacle or we shall be overcome by unreason and dark reaction."

Are those, however, the real alternatives? The SST has not convincingly shown that the absence of or retreat from rationality is our main problem, endangering our very survival. It simply presupposes that position. And here, it seems, is where the issue has to be joined. Ashis Nandy argues

- (a) that science itself is not as objective or rational an exercise as it may first appear;
- (b) that science does not in fact exist in a pure state, but only as an aspect of a society's approach to life and as a historical development; and
- (c) that in the world today, the scientific enterprise has become a major instrument of oppression and the victims have a legitimate right to resist its triumphalistic onslaught.

Positions (a) and (b) have to be conceded without much argument. On point (c), however, the issues have to be more carefully formulated. Let us try to put down some affirmations which can then be argued out if necessary:

(a) One cannot compare "pure" science and corrupt religion. The religious enterprise as well as the scientific enterprise has to be taken in the wholeness of its historical manifestation, and only afterwards can one separate pure religion or pure science.

(b) There is no debate about the negative aspects of the religious record or about the positive aspects of the record of the scientific enterprise. What the SST fails to do is to make any reference to the positive achievements of religion or to the negative record of science.

(c) The SST must concede to Ashis Nandy his charge about the complicity of science in the horror record of our own century (the century of science): that is, Nazi concentration camps, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Stalin's Siberian camps, Vietnam, Cambodia and so on. Science and scientists are answerable for their complicity.

(d) The authors of the SST should answer the charge that science too can be authoritarian — it matters not that it is a corrupt science that becomes so; for in religion too only corrupt religion leads to authoritarianism.

(e) The authors of the SST must answer the claim that others have just as much right to criticise science as science has the right to criticise non-scientific activities and pursuits.

(f) The charge that science is today a prisoner to

the military establishments which breed violence and destruction, to the military contractors bent on making a fast buck and to Transnational Corporations which make profit and power their primary principles; needs an answer.

(g) The most devastating charge is that the Scientific Temper can make the human mind arid, one-dimensional, neglectful of the most cherished values of humankind.

The debate should continue and perhaps the Nehru Centre (which organised the original debate that produced the SST) should organise a small meeting where opposing points of view can struggle to emerge in an improved draft which then can be the basis for a national debate. To say this, is of course, to express one's high appreciation of both the original Statement and of its criticisms. □

## SPECIAL REPORT

# Passage Through Pakistan—III

N.C.

This special report of an extensive tour of Pakistan by the Editor of *Mainstream* is a slightly enlarged version of the series of articles that have appeared in the daily press, including *The Times of India*. The first two parts of this article were published last issues (*Mainstream*, January 16 and 23, Republic Day Special 1982) and here are the concluding paragraphs.

MY twenty five-day journey through Pakistan has convinced me that the time has come for an in-depth re-appreciation on our part of the prevailing mood of the people of Pakistan towards India. I could not escape the conclusion that although there is vested interest in certain sections in Pakistan — as there are in India — to fan the embers of mutual animosity, there is a very perceptible desire on the part of the overwhelming majority of the people to establish close rapport with the people of our country — provided they get an opportunity to express themselves through the ballot box.

"Bridges must be built even if barriers take time to be pulled down", said an elderly lady from a very political family. The lifting of restrictions on travels is a universal desire and non-official exchange of men and women in the intellectual and cultural world would go a long way towards better understanding at all levels.

From Mohenjodaro to Fatehpur Sikri, from Texila to Hyderabad, there are a number of reference points in the common cultural heritage of the two countries that need to be kept alive for the generations that have come up after Partition. From Lahore to Lucknow via Delhi, from Karachi to Calcutta via Bombay, the crossroads of culture and commerce need to be repaired and broadened. It

is not just a question of a no-war pledge, we have to build the structure of durable peace.

GENERAL Zia's offer of No-war pact makes sense so far as he is concerned: if he has to be alert on the western front, he would naturally like to keep his rear in peace, sanctified by an official Indian commitment to it. Secondly, rapprochement with India pays good dividend inside the country, as one takes into account the present mood for friendship with India in Pakistan's populace.

But the Martial Law regime is, by General Zia's repeated commitments, a stop-gap regime: it makes no claim to having the sanction of Pakistan's electorate. Would not acknowledged political leaders in Pakistan resent if a solemn no-war pact is signed by India with a regime which is admittedly tentative?

An Opposition leader reminded me that when Bhutto went to Simla, he had taken all the Opposition bigwigs with him, as he was at that moment, not a plenipotentiary elected by the people of Pakistan. A veteran Pakistani journalist explained that MRD had questioned US giving aid to one person, and similarly there could possibly be no tangible political sanction behind any no-war offer coming from the present martial law bosses, who can only claim to be running a caretaker establishment.

I looked out of the plane window and watched Lahore landscape disappearing. Our brothers and sisters down there are eager to live in peace and friendship with us, but would they not misunderstand if we sign a pact with a regime that they intensely dislike and want to replace by an elected one?

In the struggle for democracy in Pakistan lies the future of friendship between the two countries of the same subcontinent. (January 27) (Concluded) □

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