INTRASPECIFIC VIOLENCE IS NOW ESTABLISHED AS A BIOLOGICAL PHENOMENON INNISIC TO LIVING NATURE. ETHOLOGISTS MAINTAIN THAT CULTURALLY MOLDED PROGRAMS OF AGGRESSION WHICH CAN BE RELEASED BY CERTAIN ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS EXIST IN THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AMONG HIGHER ANIMALS. EVIDENCE ALSO SUGGESTS THAT THERE CO-EXISTS A BIOLOGICAL CAPACITY FOR MORALITY AND EMPATHY. A CHILD BY THE AGE OF TWO IS ENDEOWED WITH THE CAPACITY TO REFRAIN FROM HURTING ANOTHER PERSON PURELY BY IDENTIFYING HIMSELF WITH THE OTHER. THIS MORAL FACULTY IS STRENGTHENED BY PARENTAL TRAINING, APPROPRIATE ROLE MODELS AND A NURTURING SOCIETY. IN INDIA TODAY, THE WEAKENING OF CULTURAL VALUES DUE TO RAPID SOCIAL CHANGE AND THE INABILITY OF ELDERS AND LEADERSHIP TO PRESENT A CLEAR SET OF VALUES WHICH THEY THEMSELVES LIVE BY HAS INDUCED A SENSE OF ALIENATION, POWERLESSNESS AND MEANINGLESSNESS AMONG THE YOUTH. THIS MAKES THEM EXTREMELY SUSCEPTIBLE TO PROGRAMS OF AGGRESSION, ALL THE WHILE WEAKENING THEIR EMPATHIC AND MORAL INCLINATIONS. THE PAPER ATTEMPTS AN IN-DEPTH PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATIONS OF THESE ISSUES AND ALSO OTHER FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLENCE IN INDIA. PSYCHOLOGICALLY ROOTED STRATEGIES TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF VIOLENCE IN INDIA ARE ALSO DISCUSSED.

**Key words:** violence, aggression, terrorism, communalism, leadership, alienation, morality, empathy, militant enthusiasm.

**INTRODUCTION**

It is a matter of great concern that there is an increasing tendency amongst the Indian youth to adopt antisocial and violent means to attain, what they believe, are legitimate goals. No day passes without newspaper reports of indiscriminate destruction of public property and murderous frenzy erupting in different part of the country.

The situation is frighteningly complex. No one can underestimate the hurt caused to regional pride or the pain caused by economic disparities, religious bigotry and caste hierarchies. No one denies the role of political forces both within and outside the country which exploit our youth in the name of injustice.

But how does one explain the senselessness of violence, for example that shown against the innocent families of Punjab policemen or that shown in self-immolations which followed the proposed implementation of Mandal Commission recommendations? What purpose could this kind of violence serve, however worthy the cause? And how does one explain the wayward destruction of public property which emerges when students are not allowed to indulge in copying in an examination or when tickets to a coveted cinema show are not available; surely the flimsiest of reasons for such an outrageous response?

**ETHOLOGICAL BASIS OF VIOLENCE**

Violence is a part of nature. One living being survives by committing violence against the other. But what about violence against members of one's own species? Is that also a part of nature? According to ethologists, it is, the purpose being as follows:

1. Distributions of population over large areas so that there is greater access to food.
2. Selection of the best and strongest genes.
3. Defence of the young.
4. Forming of hierarchies.

In higher animals, especially amongst human beings, the development of culture has devised other methods of achieving the same purpose. But, subprograms of aggression still exist in our nervous system and are unleashed when triggered off by specific environmental cues.

One form of intraspecific violence relevant to our discussion, which is programmed in our nervous system is what Lorenz (1963) calls Militant Enthusiasm. According to him, Militant Enthusiasm is the basis for communal aggression. "A shiver runs down the back..., along with the outside of both arms. The instinctive inhibitions against hurting or killing one's fellows, lose unfortunately, much of their power. Rational considerations, criticisms and all reasonable arguments against the behavior dic-
tated by militant enthusiasm are silenced by amazing reversal of values, making them not only untenable but base and dishonorable. Men may enjoy the feeling of absolute righteousness even while they commit atrocities...." Lorenz believes that this communal defence response must originally have been made to protect a community of concrete individually known members of a group, held together by a band of personal love and friendship. But over time, through a process of conditioning, the same response would now occur when the group’s values, rites, customs or symbols are challenged.

**ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS TO AGGRESSION**

What are the environmental cues which trigger off aggression programs in the nervous system? It requires little more than common sense to understand that such cues would be provided by the frustrations and provocations of every day life. However, not everyone responds to frustrations and provocations with aggression and violence. People learn to be aggressive through the process of identification with aggressive models, especially in societies where being aggressive carries a positive status level and where aggression brings rewards (Short, 1968).

The aggressive models need not be alive. Symbolic models as shown in films and television have been demonstrated to increase the aggressive response amongst viewers. Research has shown that film and television violence can have at least four different effects. Firstly, it teaches newer techniques of committing violence (Bandura, 1973). Secondly, it loosens one’s natural restraints especially when “super” heroes do the killing and good triumphs over evil by violent means (Berkowitz, 1970). Thirdly, it desensitizes and habituates people to the consequences of violence (Cline et al, 1973). Finally, it distorts the experience of social reality; heavy viewers of television violence are less trustful of others and over-estimate their chances of being criminally victimized (Gerbener & Gross, 1976).

While frustrations resulting from deprivation are the main instigators of violence, it is also known that most impoverished people do not aggress, but instead react with helplessness and apathy. Discontent in fact produces aggression only amongst those who have had some success in raising their living conditions. Davies (1969) has pointed out that revolutions occur when rising expectations which accompany this success somehow meet with blocks and sharp reversals. It has also been shown that people judge their status not by comparing themselves with their own past but with those around who seem to be doing better. It is this relative deprivation which seems to matter.

One of the most powerful releasers of aggression is membership of a crowd. In a sociological classic written in 1896, Le Bon describes the psychological characteristics of a crowd. Prentice-Dunn and Rogers (1983) have reviewed more recent research on the subject. It seems that there are two major mechanisms which promote aggression in a crowd. The first is a sense of anonymity which allows persons to feel that they may not be held responsible for their actions. This is a conscious mechanism. The second is an unconscious process of deindividuation which undermines self awareness. As a result, the crowd becomes highly suggestible to external stimuli which can sway its mood and behavior from one extreme to another in quick succession.

Perceptions and emotions get distorted imparting an almost religious significance to the issue at hand. The tendency is to become dogmatic and there is a desire to spread the dogma. Contradictions are not tolerated. Not prepared to tolerate obstacles between desire and its realization, the collective mind is willing to commit aggression of a kind otherwise impossible if the members of the group were on their own. A leader who is himself intoxicated by his message and is able to convey it through vivid imagery backed by convictions which are affirmed repeatedly can lead this collective mind as far as he chooses. If he is also astute enough to use cultural symbols like flags or much loved mythological figures - which according to Jung (1978) are ultimately derived from essential archetypes thus having an immense psychic charge - he becomes unstoppable.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL BASIS OF MORALITY**

If violence is so pervasive, has deep psychological basis and is constantly in danger of being triggered off by environmental factors, why is it that the human species has not annihilated itself?

This annihilation is prevented by another program which is also a part of our biological heritage, though in our evolutionary history it appeared much later than aggression. This is the program of Empathy. According to Fenichel (1945) empathy consists of two acts: (a) an identification with the other person and (b) an awareness of one’s own feelings.
after the identification, and in this way awareness of the object's feelings. There are good reasons to believe that the basic capacity for empathy is present in some precursor form at birth (Brothers, 1980). It is subsequently elaborated by cognitive maturation and social experience, so that by the age of two, a child is able to put herself in another person's shoes and say, "let me not hurt her because she is like me" (Kagan, 1983).

Empathy is the base on which the future moral standards of the person are built and for the blossoming of which this program needs systematic nurturing by the society. Parental training of the do's and don'ts are important for the strengthening of this faculty. Also important is the availability of role models such as parents, teachers, friends, mythical figures - with whom the child can identify. Healthy societies use these models to propagate the values of friendship, togetherness and mutual give and take. Parents and teachers talk about these values, often reinforcing the words with suitable rewards and punishments. Stories are available from history and mythology eulogizing heroes and heroines who exhibit these qualities. Most importantly, people around the growing child - parents, teachers, relatives, friends - must exemplify these qualities themselves.

By the age of ten, a child starts looking for a match between what is said and done. When role models practice differently from what they preach, it creates tremendous anxiety in the mind of a child. It must be understood that his need to fashion oneself on a role model is very strong in growing children, especially during adolescence. So strong is this need that when cultural values are weak or when models are inconsistent, the young feel a sense of hopelessness and helplessness. The cultural values become weak when society is undergoing rapid social change. The weakening of these values lead to a sense of isolation, confusion, personal disorganization and alienation. Alienation in turn gives rise to a sense of powerlessness. Major social institutions like government, political parties, leaders and judiciary appear unresponsive, remote, ineffective and untrustworthy. Life starts appearing meaningless. The young then respond either by withdrawing from adulthood, leading an escapist existence or by allowing the aggression program to take over. The consequence here is lashing out in violence at the slightest frustration or following small men with limited vision only because they appear to be clear and consistent.

VIOLENCE IN INDIA

Something of the sort described above is happening in India today. Relative deprivation is too obvious. Aggressive stance often gets rewarded. Television and film violence is on the increase. Small men appear to be exploiting the minds of crowds assembled around genuine or imagined 'injustices'. There is a weakening of cultural values, bringing about a sense of meaninglessness. Just like nature abhors a vacuum, human existence abhors meaninglessness; hence the young of India have created new meanings to live by. Seeing the immense social and economic disparities, some of them have adopted a consciously violent ideology to wipe out these differences, as is evident in the leftist violence of Bengali Naxalites or in the People's War Group of Andhra and northern Karnataka. Others have seen meaning in ethnic ideology.

According to Hobsbawm (1992), there is in a rapidly changing society a social disorientation and a "fraying, sometimes snapping, of (the) network which bound people together...." Under these circumstances, one way of acquiring meaning is identification with one's ethnic group. The differences between people become exaggerated and history is twisted to provide illustrations which distinguish 'them' from 'us'. Ethnic identification has in many cases led to communal tendencies which have often been expressed violently.

A number of young people have chosen the path of terrorism, whether in support of the leftist or in support of communal ideology. This is not the place to examine the historical, political and sociological dimensions of terrorism but let us examine the mind of a terrorist. There are those like Crenshaw (1990) who see terrorism as a conscious, intentional decision of a group, reached deliberately. As opposed to Crenshaw, Post (1990) believes that terrorists are driven to commit acts of violence because of psychological pressures. In his opinion, the terrorist has suffered narcissistic wounds in childhood which implies that the self is not able to integrate its own good and bad parts. The individual idolizes the grandiose aspects and projects onto others the hatred and devalued aspects of his psyche. The 'other' obviously must be destroyed.

Sprinzak (1990) thinks that it is more important to understand the group dynamics rather than personal psychology. He sees three stages in the
development of terrorist dynamics. Firstly, there is a crisis of confidence with the established political system. Next, the legitimacy of the system is questioned. It is not just the leaders who are seen to be manipulative but the system itself. Finally, the individuals and the society identified with the existing system get depersonalized and dehumanized. Dehumanization allows one to commit atrocities. What is important here is that there is a psychological transformation of the members of the group. Not only do they get isolated from the world, but each individual act acquires a collective meaning. Often this group is the first to which the individual has ever belonged. Greater the isolation of the individual, greater is the need to belong. Greater the relief felt on joining, greater is the likelihood that one will agree to take part in atrocities.

CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE TO FRUSTRATION

Fortunately not all the young in India have seen meaning in following a destructive ideology. Some have taken to constructive programs. The frustrations in their case appear to have instilled in their minds a desire to rebuild social and moral values. One sees heartening examples in voluntary movements for women's upliftment, health care, environmental protection, adult literacy and so on. What makes some people respond to the social turmoil in India with violence and others with moral and social commitments is not very clear.

One sees the similarity of their anti-establishment views but why they take separate roads from that point onwards needs to be analyzed. It is important that we do so, for only then can the energy of youth be channelized more productively. A study in progress (Kapur & Sen, 1992) addresses this issue.

CRISIS IN INDIAN LEADERSHIP

An account of the psychological basis of violence in India will not be complete without reference to the crisis in Indian leadership. It has been mentioned earlier that the young look up to elders to provide role models on whom to fashion themselves. While in western culture, by the end of adolescence one assumes one's own identity and internalizes moral standards, in the Indian, traditionally hierarchical society, the elders continue to interpret the social and moral values for the young. This gives the older generation an authority before which the younger have always bowed. When this authority related to age is combined with authority of rank in an organization, it becomes a very powerful tool. This did not matter too much when social values were clear and the leaders were only the interpreters. But, with social change, these values have become unclear and all that is left with the leaders is the authority without reference to any clear guiding moral code.

Very few leaders are able to handle this power in a sane manner. Some becomes tyrants where selfish interests and changing moods determine the codes others have to follow; the codes themselves changes with shifting interests and new arguments are produced for the consumption of juniors to support these shifts. This is one model. The other model is that of leaders who, because of the absence of guiding principles, become anxious and start compiling rules and regulations dealing with every possible situation. These rules are enforced in a rigid fashion forgetting that rules were made to serve human beings and not the other way around.

One sees both models of leadership in families, educational institutions, work situation and even at the national level. It is no wonder that people are angry with the leadership. However, since they feel too powerless to assert themselves against a hierarchical system, their aggression comes out in form of malicious gossip, severe paranoia, groupism, strikes and acts of indiscriminate violence like burning of buses and destruction of public property.

CONTROL OF VIOLENCE

Are there strategies, firmly rooted in psychological principles, which could be offered to reduce violence in India? Before examining this any further we shall have to first answer another important question. Is violence always wrong? Must it always be controlled? Ted Honderich (1989), the famous Oxford philosopher, looks at this question squarely in its face and concludes that violence may be justified in reducing certain kinds of inequalities. It is my personal view however, that even in the most extreme cases, violence need not be the best or the only solution, though those compelled to indulge in it might deserve an understanding response from us. I present two arguments in support of this view.

Firstly, there is the simple argument that violence begets violence. A group may supersede the other at one juncture, but as history shows, the see-saw of violence will go on till the dominance of the other remains the dominant program in our nervous system. Happily, history has also shown that human beings have slowly, faltering, often imperceptibly
but decidedly, developed moral values and supporting socio-political strategies which put a squeeze on this program. The idea of human equality for the defense of which Honderich advocates violence, is itself, a revolutionary idea - crystallized during the French revolution - which has acted as a bulwark against many kinds of violence. As I have mentioned earlier, this idea of the other being the same as myself has a psycho-biological basis in the neural program of empathy.

There is another dimension of human psyche which rebuts violence. I refer to the spiritual dimension. As we all know there are moments in our life, e.g. listening to music, watching a beautiful sunset or sexual union with a beloved partner when we lose the sense of self and feel one with our surroundings, sometime with the whole universe. Maslow (1973) calls these "peak experiences". These experiences can be enhanced and brought under voluntary control by a variety of methods and, in my opinion, the spiritual dimension is cultivated out of these. So similar is the description of these experiences by different people in different cultures and in response to different environmental cues that I believe these are rooted in human neurobiology. The biological correlate is of a higher order than empathy, for here we are not only talking about seeing another as oneself but about losing the boundaries of self, mingling with both living and non-living nature.

This experience is non-violent by definition, for how do you agree against someone or something with whom or which you feel one? Many movements across the world designed for personal and social transformation (Ferguson, 1981) provide evidence for this dimension.

Having argued forcefully in favor of controlling human aggression, I find myself at a loss when faced with the challenge of finding sound psychological strategies for controlling the current spate of violence in India. It is not that there is a dearth of such strategies but so difficult is their implementation and so many are the vested interests against invoking these that one feels despondent and helpless. Nevertheless, here are some suggestions which derive from proven psychological principles:

1. With the increase in communication brought on by the scientific advancement, every one is getting to know how his neighbor lives and the feeling of relative deprivation is getting more and more pronounced. This feeling must be reduced through socio-political strategies as quickly as is possible in a democratic setup. One insists on the maintenance of a democratic set up because, though in the short term an autocratic regime could cut down obvious inequalities more easily, only a democratic set up can keep its eyes and ears open to the new inequalities which always crop up when a social system is tinkered with. Sound psychological principles tell us that anything done with force, even a benevolent act, will produce repercussions which one must know about and deal with on a continuing basis. Only in a democracy is this possible.

2. We cannot have a true democracy if we do not allow adulthood in our society. Unfortunately, all the pressures of our society - all its traditions of obedience to the older - enforce the indefinite prolongation of adolescence. It is extremely difficult to train a family to change its child rearing practices. However, society can instill independence in thinking by encouraging a spirit of inquiry at the school level. Students who ask questions and teachers who answer them in an open manner should be suitably rewarded. One important step in the direction of independent thinking would be to allow academic credits for students who wish to live away from their families, travel around the country and actively mix with ethnic groups different from their own. Suitable programs can be built up to instil and evaluate 'education through experience'.

3. Another step we must take is towards introducing value education in our schools. One of the most powerful methods of value education is through role models. While it might be difficult to produce live role models which fit our prescription, it is possible in a country with such a strong multi-cultural heritage as India to introduce in the curriculum, stories about characters who exemplify the values of friendship, compassion and mutual give and take instead of highlighting, as is now done, stories about winning and losing battles. Mental health professionals can take up research projects to cull out such stories from the almost limitless repertoire we possess in this country.

4. There is an urgent need to stop the depiction of violence on films and television. As mentioned earlier, there is a clear proof that screen violence encourages real life violence. A voluntary movement against film and television violence supported by documentary proof of its ill effects must be started. Who better than members of the Indian Psychiatric Society to lead such a movement!
5. It is a well known psychological principle that one's identity at a lower level must be strong enough before attempting to achieve a higher order identity, just as the foundation of a house must be strong before the ground floor is built, that of the ground floor before the first floor is built and so one. One's identity as a member of a family, a village, a language group or a religious group must be strong before attempting to foist as abstract a notion as membership of a nation. Decentralization in the cultural sense must be seen as a necessity and not as a source of danger. In this context, the story of how Bhiwandi maintained peace during the last Bombay riots seems very relevant.

Bhiwandi has a high representation of both Hindus and Muslims. Previously, whenever there was tension between these two communities anywhere in the country, Bhiwandi would see the outbreak of communal violence. This time, religious leaders of both groups endorsed the Bhiwandi identity by pointing out that the residents of this small township had a duty to see that the name of their town was not sullied once again. As a result, in spite of all pressures and temptations from outsiders, peace was kept.

In conclusion, it is the author's intention to point out that psychiatrists, both during their training and later during their active professional career, develop skills and insights which could be used more broadly than just for the service of psychiatric patients. One hopes that this paper will encourage some of them to undertake research or carry out intervention tasks - some of them based on the suggestions given above which could be useful in the process of building a healthier nation.

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