

Violence in our society

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At present, Pakistan society is beset with a myriad of problems but a closer study of the overall situation, prevailing in the country, leads one to the painful conclusion that violence is the most serious of them all. As long as violence prevails in the society, there is no room for democratic rights, values and institutions, any hope for social or economic development or for people's well being or peace or even stability in the country. A very great majority of people in our country are at present deeply concerned about the way violence has overtaken practically every aspect of life in our society.

Incidents of violence involving mob hysteria are also becoming increasingly common in the society. The tendency to go about destroying public property and targeting rival groups and individuals as a means of registering protest or seeking justice has been a disturbing phenomenon in recent years. Religious and political parties have unfortunately added to the problem of multiple polarisation of society by shirking their social responsibility to keep their workers, passions in check. Thus their workers fall an easy prey to mob hysteria and resort to violence. This ambience points to a steady erosion of society's values and norms, including tolerance and peaceful co-existence between different groups and communities. The trend can be greatly reversed if all the stakeholders individuals, religious and political leaders, and public officials realise the fissionable potential of the prevailing situation and do all they can to discourage propensities towards violence, intolerance and also overreaction all around and at all levels.

Violence crimes in our country have also registered an upward trend in recent years. The headlines of the various national dailies and the television and radio news bulletins that follow always indicate that in the big cities and urban centres of the country like Karachi and Lahore, we are being increasingly menaced by a growing band of robbers, dacoits, hooligans and thugs. Similarly doctors and medical specialists, all over the country have now begun to realise that woman brought to them by their husbands or other family members with mysterious injuries putatively associated with minor accidents are, in fact not suffering from 'fragile bones' but are the victims of engaged assaults by their emotionally disturbed husbands or other male members of their families. The great majority of those who perpetrate such violence on woman fall into the unsatisfactory sociopathic or psychopathic category. It is also most unfortunate that the attacking of woman in our society is not only confined to people with a psychopathic personality or of borderline socio-economic status; it also occurs among people with good education and a stable financial background. Domestic violence is not only the failure of civilisation but is in its own way a flight from reason.

The crime of rape has also shown an upward trend in our society in recent years. There is a consensus that although there is often an element of aggression involved in

a sexual offence, the one sexual crime that can be really violent is rape. It is probably best described as sexual intercourse between a man and woman of any age, who are not married by means of force, fraud, or intimidation. Like other violent offences the figures for rape are also on the increase in our country. Apart from rape, some other violent offences which have increased in our society fairly recently are violent property crimes such as robberies, dacoities and thefts after preparation for death.

Indeed, the great majority of people in this country are now witnesses to and victims of violence all around them, criminal violence, social violence, religious and sectarian violence, ethnic and linguistic violence, tribal, clan, family and domestic violence. There is violence within the precincts of the mosque, the home, the police station and educational institutions in various parts of the country. No place however sacrosanct is safe in this regard. It is now abundantly clear that we, as a nation have abandoned the path of argument, reasoning and persuasion.

Before we can even consider the question of controlling violence in the society, we have to consider some fundamental

This is only partly true in man, who has a number of emotional and dependency needs, which, if unfulfilled, leave him in a precarious position, and so those who can fulfil such needs have power over the individual concerned. In a well-organised family, for example, the children obey their parents because they need approval, affection and such like, all of which can be withheld for disobedience. The causative factors, which constitute precipitants of violence, are frustrations, grievances and pain, unstable social systems and hierarchies, and crowding and a shortage of resources.

issues. Firstly, with any social phenomenon, control is determinants of violence: (I) firearms and destructiveness (II) precipitants, and (III) human attitudes. It is quite apparent that violence control is best examined for each of these determinants. Of the three determinants, attitudes is by far the most important, because basically, it is man's view of himself, his inner aggressive needs, his relationship with his fellow man that finally determinants whether violence occurs or not. If violent attitudes were to disappear altogether, then precipitants could not trigger a fight and all weapons would lie idle. One of the major objectives in seeking for control of violence is the establishment of a stable hierarchy. Some of the animal studies may have led us to believe that hierarchies only work through physical strength and the threat of violence.

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tion and such like, all of which can be withheld for disobedience. The causative factors, which constitute precipitants of violence, are frustrations, grievances and pain, unstable social systems and hierarchies, and crowding and a shortage of resources. In order to reduce the amount of violence in society, these factors will have to be removed or reduced. In practice, attitudes have to change before this can happen.

At the criminal level (murder, violent assaults, battered wives, dacoity, robbery and the like) the precipitants are very personal and outside of general social control, but a few general factors do probably operate. Dacoity or robbery for example is best seen as an extension of theft, and the factors underlying stealing need to be corrected, we have got to find some way of adapting our competitive goal oriented society so that irritable husband wives and children do not jar one another's nerve by open proximity. The two important precipitants are loneliness and homelessness.

Both may lead to or be associated with excessive drug abuse and both produce intense frustration and anger. Most frustrated people are those, who feel rejected by the society and find it increasingly difficult to obtain work or gainful employments.

fall out with their relatives and friends and lose their lodgings, attitudes, drives, desires, call them what you will are the basis of all aggressive activities, including violence. Even when a man is simply being violent because he is told to do so, he obeys because of his attitudes of cooperativeness, his superior has had the violent desire. Change attitudes, therefore and all the rest follows.

Not so easy but we have to start in childhood. Training is the key to this problem, although unfortunately we are as yet all too ignorant about any changes we may make. For the average child we as a community have to

make up our minds that we are concerned about violence training. Then we have to give one another and especially our children, non-violent examples of behaviour to copy. Violence of all kinds should be eschewed (e.g., corporal appointment to children) and violent acts should never be condoned or sanctioned. When people have violent feelings the community must devise ways of indicating that acting upon these feelings is not acceptable but it must do so in non-violent ways. For the children brought up in a disturbed environment we need courage to act on our knowledge that those who are persistently ill-treated, beaten up, and brutalised are especially likely to become violent adults and should be removed to a loving and non-violent environment.

The effects of prejudice and hate must to some extent be minimised by legislation that gives an ostracised group the right to defend it self without resort to fighting. In other words, civil liberties should not just be a conceptual framework but any aggrieved individual who feels persecuted by other individuals or by the police should have the opportunity to an independent third party as an arbitrator.