

## The Morality of Boycott

Ages ago there was a priest of Baal who thought himself commissioned by the god to kill all who did not bow the knee to him. All men, terrified by the power and ferocity of the priest, bowed down before the idol and pretended to be his servants; and the few who refused, had to take refuge in hills and deserts. At last a deliverer came and slew the priest and the world had rest. The slayer was blamed by those who placed religion in quietude and put passivity forward as the ideal ethics, but the world looked on him as an incarnation of God.

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A certain class of minds shrink from aggressiveness as if it were a sin. Their temperament forbids them to feel the delight of battle and they look on what they cannot understand as something monstrous and sinful. "Heal hate by love, drive out injustice by justice, slay sin by righteousness" is their cry. Love is a sacred name, but it is easier to speak of love than to love. The love which drives out hate, is a divine quality of which only one man in a thousand is capable. A saint full of love for all mankind possesses it, a philanthropist consumed with the desire to heal the miseries of the race possesses it, but the mass of mankind do not and cannot rise to that height. Politics is concerned with masses of mankind and not with individuals. To ask masses of mankind to act as saints, to rise to the height of divine love and practise it in relation to their adversaries or oppressors, is to ignore human nature. It is to set a premium on injustice and violence by paralysing the hand of the deliverer when raised to strike. The Gita is the best answer to those who shrink from battle as a sin and aggression as a lowering of morality.

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A poet of sweetness and love who has done much to awaken Bengal, has written deprecating the boycott as an act of hate. The saintliness of spirit which he would see brought into politics is the reflex of his own personality colouring the political ideals of a sattwic race. But in reality the boycott is not an act of hate. It is an act of self-defence, of aggression for the sake of self-preservation. To call it an act of hate is to say that a man who is being slowly murdered, is not justified in striking out at his murderer. To tell that man that he must desist from using the first effective weapon that comes to his hand because the blow would be an act of hate, is precisely on a par with this deprecation of boycott. Doubtless the self-defender is not precisely actuated by feelings of holy sweetness towards his assailant, but to expect so much from human nature is impracticable. Certain religions demand it, but they have never been practised to the letter by their followers.

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Hinduism recognizes human nature and makes no such impossible demand. It sets one ideal for the saint, another for the man of action, a third for the trader, a fourth for the serf. To prescribe the same ideal for all is to bring about *varnasankara*, the confusion of duties, and destroy society and the race. If we are content to be serfs, then indeed boycott is a sin for us, not because it is a violation of love, but because it is a violation of the Sudra's duty of obedience and contentment. Politics is the field of the Kshatriya and the morality of the Kshatriya ought to govern our political actions. To impose on politics the Brahminical duty of saintly sufferance, is to preach *varnasankara*.

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Love has a place in politics, but it is the love for one's country, for one's countrymen, for the glory, greatness and happiness of the race, the divine *ananda* of self-immolation for one's fellows, the ecstasy of relieving their sufferings, the joy of seeing one's blood flow for country and freedom, the bliss of union in death with

the fathers of the race. The feeling of almost physical delight in the touch of the mother soil, of the winds that blow from Indian seas, of the rivers that stream from Indian hills, in the sight of Indian surroundings, Indian men, Indian women, Indian children, in the hearing of Indian speech, music, poetry, in the familiar sights, sounds, habits, dress, manners of our Indian life, this is the physical root of that love. The pride in our past, the pain of our present, the passion for the future are its trunk and branches. Self-sacrifice, self-forgetfulness, great service and high endurance for the country are its fruit. And the sap which keeps it alive is the realisation of the Motherhood of God in the country, the vision of the Mother, the knowledge of the Mother, the perpetual contemplation, adoration and service of the Mother.

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Other love than this is foreign to the motives of political action. Between nation and nation there is justice, partiality, chivalry, duty but not love. All love is either individual, or for the self in the race or for the self in mankind. It may exist between individuals of different races, but the love of one race for another is a thing foreign to nature. When, therefore, the boycott as declared by the Indian race against the British is stigmatised for want of love, the charge is bad psychology as well as bad morality. It is interest warring against interest, and hatred is directed not really against the race but against the adverse interest. If the British exploitation were to cease tomorrow, the hatred against the British race would disappear in a moment. A partial *adhyaropa* makes the ignorant for the moment see in the exploiters and not in the exploitation the receptacle of the hostile feeling. But like all Maya it is an unreal and fleeting sentiment and is not shared by those who think. Not hatred against foreigners, but antipathy to the evils of foreign exploitation is the true root of boycott.

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If hatred is demoralising, it is also stimulating. The web of life has been made a mingled strain of good and evil and God works

His ends through the evil as well as through the good. Let us discharge our minds of hate, but let us not deprecate a great and necessary movement because in the inevitable course of human nature, it has engendered feelings of hostility and hatred. If hatred came, it was necessary that it should come as a stimulus, as a means of awakening. When *tamas*, inertia, torpor have benumbed a nation, the strongest forms of *rajas* are necessary to break the spell, and there is no form of *rajas* so strong as hatred. Through *rajas* we rise to *sattwa*, and for the Indian temperament, the transition does not take long. Already the element of hatred is giving place to the clear conception of love for the Mother as the spring of our political actions.

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Another question is the use of violence in the furtherance of boycott. This is, in our view, purely a matter of policy and expediency. An act of violence brings us into conflict with the law and such a conflict may be inexpedient for a race circumstanced like ours. But the moral question does not arise. The argument that to use violence is to interfere with personal liberty involves a singular misunderstanding of the very nature of politics. The whole of politics is an interference with personal liberty. Law is such an interference, Protection is such an interference, the rule which makes the will of the majority prevail is such an interference. The right to prevent such use of personal liberty as will injure the interests of the race, is the fundamental law of society. From this point of view the nation is only using its primary right when it restrains the individual from buying or selling foreign goods.

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It may be argued that peaceful compulsion is one thing and violent compulsion another. Social boycott may be justifiable, but not the burning or drowning of British goods. The latter method, we reply, is illegal and therefore may be inexpedient, but it is not morally unjustifiable. The morality of the Kshatriya justifies

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violence in times of war, and boycott is a war. Nobody blames the Americans for throwing British tea into Boston harbour, nor can anybody blame similar action in India on moral grounds. It is reprehensible from the point of view of law, of social peace and order, not of political morality. It has been eschewed by us because it is unwise and carries the battle on to a ground where we are comparatively weak, from a ground where we are strong. Under other circumstances we might have followed the American precedent, and if we had done so, historians and moralists would have applauded, not censured.

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Justice and righteousness are the atmosphere of political morality, but the justice and righteousness of the fighter, not of the priest. Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked, violence unrighteous when used wantonly or for unrighteous ends. It is a barren philosophy which applies a mechanical rule to all actions, or takes a word and tries to fit all human life into it. The sword of the warrior is as necessary to the fulfilment of justice and righteousness as the holiness of the saint. Ramdas is not complete without Shivaji. To maintain justice and prevent the strong from despoiling and the weak from being oppressed is the function for which the Kshatriya was created. Therefore, says Sri Krishna in the Mahabharat, God created battle and armour, the sword, the bow and the dagger.