

3rd Session

143rd Plenary Meeting, 25th September, 1948

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Mrs. Pandit (India)* declared that it was a matter of satisfaction to her delegation that the present session of the General Assembly was being held in Paris. India had received much inspiration from France. India's struggle for freedom, its thought and ideals had been influenced by France. The Indian people had loved France and what it had stood for; they had been grieved during the unhappy period when France's freedom had suffered a temporary eclipse; and they rejoiced that France had again taken its rightful place in the world.

The three years that had passed since the creation of the United Nations had not been easy ones. The peace which had emerged from the travail of a lengthy war was an uneasy peace and apprehensions of another war already threatened mankind. During that period the United Nations had been faced with many grave problems, and it would be dangerous self-delusion to say that they had been tackled successfully. But the lack of success had not been due to any lack of courage or enterprise on the part of the United Nations. The mistakes made were mainly due to the fact that Members of the United Nations had not been true to the spirit of the Charter. There had been a disturbing tendency for legal arguments to be regarded as more important than human and moral

considerations, which tendency was leading to the undermining of the Charter. That attitude was also responsible for accentuating disharmony between the big Powers. The General Assembly was meeting at a time when differences between the big Powers were most acute.

Serious disagreement had developed over the peace treaty for Germany, the deadlock in Berlin, the control and use of atomic energy, disarmament, and the creation of a world force, to mention but a few examples. Every field of international endeavour was threatened by the ever-widening gulf between the major Powers. So long as the shadow of conflict hung over the councils of the world there could be no progress and no sense of security. The disappearance of that harmony among the Big Five which, while it had lasted, had been the greatest single factor in winning the most deadly war in human history, now endangered the peace of the world. The responsibility of the Big Five was far

heavier than it had ever been, and greater than ever before was the need for tolerance, moderation and a spirit of accommodation in all their deliberations.

India had tried to judge all questions before the General Assembly as objectively as possible. For India the spirit of the Charter meant much more than its letter. India had, in the past, avoided alignment with any one bloc-an attitude which had often been misunderstood. Indians were, however, convinced that, that stand was correct even if it entailed some temporary disadvantage. It was not based on any weakness, but the result of the conviction that by avoiding to be grouped with any bloc of Powers, in however small a fashion, India was helping in the maintenance of peace. It was India's view that, if the world should be divided into two distinct and opposing groups, a future conflict would become inevitable, and within the General Assembly itself the formation of Power blocs would interfere with that undivided allegiance which Member States owed to the Organization. India saw danger in the lesser loyalties which bound those groups together prevailing over the larger loyalty which all members owed, through the United Nations Charter, to

the peoples of the world.

Many momentous questions were to be discussed in the present year. In the view of the Indian delegation one of the most important items was the problem of atomic energy control and disarmament.

Her delegation shared the regret of the General Assembly that many months of effort by the Atomic Energy Commission had proved fruitless, and that the Commission, faced with a deadlock, had suspended its activities. As an underdeveloped country, India was interested in the use of atomic energy for peaceful and beneficent purposes. It trusted that a fresh approach would be brought to the question of the utilization of atomic energy for such purposes and for the elimination of the weapons of war, and earnestly hoped that the present deliberations would pave the way for the reconciliation of opposing points of view.

No progress had been made with the question of disarmament. It was obvious that the threat of war could not be banished from the world unless the present race for armaments was abandoned. As had been emphasized by the Secretary-General, almost as important as the elimination of atomic weapons was the outlawing of biological and chemical warfare, which was said to have been perfected to such an extent as to threaten the very existence of mankind. The General Assembly must devote serious attention to those matters.

The present session would be called upon to consider colonial and trusteeship problems arising from Chapters XI and XII of the Charter. The views of the Indian delegation on such matters, which had been pressed at the last two sessions of the Assembly, were well known. Those provisions of the Charter it regarded as

among the most vital. India regretted the attempt in some quarters to whittle them down and was disturbed at the appearance of the forces of reaction in regard to which the representative of the Philippines had recently given such eloquent expression (139th meeting).

The Indian delegation, believing in the freedom of all peoples, wished to see the early termination of the colonial system, and the speedy attainment of self-government by all peoples inhabiting colonial or Trust Territories. It insisted on the strict observance of Chapters XI and XII, both in spirit and letter. In particular, it urged the colonial Powers to realize that the two hundred million people inhabiting the Non-Self-Governing Territories read into the provisions of the Charter relating to such territories far more than the colonial Powers were inclined to do. Those peoples read the solemn declarations made about the fundamental freedoms of all mankind, and they were asking whether those declarations were meant to apply to them, as they did to the Members of the United Nations. Could it be maintained, without a threat to world peace developing, that the General Assembly had no authority to ask the colonial Powers for concrete proofs to demonstrate that they were doing everything possible to hasten the development of self-government among the colonial peoples? India believed in the establishment of a permanent committee under Chapter XI, which would do for the Non-Self-Governing Territories what the Trusteeship Council was doing for the peoples of the trusteeship areas.

With regard to conditions in South East Asia, Mrs. Pandit said that region, which had been one of the strongholds of colonialism, was slowly emerging into freedom and was faced with internal travail and the opposition of vested foreign interests which usually accompanied the birth of freedom. These were evident in Indonesia, in Indo-China and in Malaya. India had the deepest sympathy for the people of those countries in their

struggle for freedom. It considered that Indonesia had reached a stage of autonomy which entitled it to the recognition of its sovereignty, and hoped that Indonesia would soon be welcomed as Member of the United Nation. The people of Viet-Nam had been fighting gallantly for their freedom. India hoped that the French Government and people would rise to the full height of their traditional liberalism so that Viet-Nam might attain self-government.

India was glad to welcome its friend and neighbour, Burma, in the United Nations. Its satisfaction was, however, tinged with regret at the tragic events which had taken place in Burma, not the least of which had been the loss of some of Burma's ablest leaders.

One of the greatest problems with which the world was faced at present was the continuing practice of racial discrimination in certain parts of the world. That was one of the gravest dangers to world peace. India would not tolerate distinctions which offended against the dignity of the human person.

Something that had been said from the rostrum of the previous day (141st meeting) about relations between European and non-European races being poisoned compelled her to make an observation on the allegation that the Assembly had been misused on certain occasions. When a Member State came to the rostrum of the General Assembly and spoke of the basic principles of the Charter being violated, one was entitled to ask whether a policy of racial segregation, pursued without the least regard for every one of those basic principles, of restrictive laws and measures affecting the political and economic rights of certain races, was in keeping with the allegiance Members professed to the Charter. The General Assembly would be guilty of shirking one of its most

onerous responsibilities if it did not question the propriety of Member States penalising certain sections of their people on racial grounds. The Indian delegation was uncompromisingly opposed to racial discrimination in whatever form and wherever it existed, and asked the Assembly to devote its serious attention to rooting out the cancer of racialism from the world.

When Mrs. Pandit had last addressed the General Assembly on a similar occasion a year ago (85th meeting), India had just attained its freedom. She had ventured to express its hopes; but even more than its hopes, she had stressed the dangers confronting India and its newly won freedom. During those twelve months India had passed through a period of storm and turmoil which had more than confirmed its worst apprehensions. Violence had raised its head in many parts of India and Pakistan and, early that year, India had made the supreme sacrifice of Mahatma Gandhi, under whose guidance and inspiration its freedom had been won. She stood before the Assembly in all humility and admitted that India had been unworthy of its great leader.

The new government of free India had to race numerous and formidable problems. It had made many mistakes during the current year, even some serious mistakes, but the mistakes had been more or less inevitable in the exceptional circumstances in which India had found its freedom. But of one mistake it had not been guilty. India was not an aggressor nation, and had no aggressive intentions towards anyone, outside or inside its borders. India's faith in the democratic way of life was deep and enduring and therefore it could never pursue an aggressive policy. Mrs. Pandit flung back that charge in the face of those who had the audacity to make it.

In spite of those difficulties and mistakes, India, under its present leaders, had made great and striking progress in many

directions, and the direct consequence would be the raising of the standards of life for the common man. In education, public health and agriculture, in irrigation and hydro-electric projects, in the building of roads of all kinds, from national highways to village tracks, in the improvement of the conditions of labour, both industrial and agricultural-indeed, in all that concerned the daily lives of the three hundred million people of India-there had been achievements of which Indians could legitimately be proud.

Twice within the course of the current year, India had appeared before the Security Council. On the first occasion, it had been on its own initiative, in the hope that the Security Council would investigate the causes of its dispute with Pakistan about Kashmir.¹ More recently,² India had appeared before the Security Council in response to the complaint made against it by the Nizam of Hyderabad.

Mrs. Pandit felt that the Assembly would expect her to say a word or two on the matters which were in the minds of most people when they thought of India at present -Kashmir and Hyderabad.

On Kashmir she did not need to say much. The United Nations had appointed a commission of mediation (S/654), which had been in India since the previous July. In spite of certain misgivings, India had co-operated fully with the Commission and had endeavoured to make its labours fruitful. The Commission would soon prepare its interim report and present it to the United Nations. Meanwhile, it was best for all concerned to say nothing, except to express the hope that the report might pave the way to the speedy restoration of peace.

On Hyderabad Mrs. Pandit had to speak more fully. Since her arrival in France, nothing had roused her indignation so much as the constant and persistent misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the action which India had felt obliged to take in Hyderabad a few days previously. Of the legal aspect of the matter she would say nothing; she was at present concerned only with the moral issue.

People often asked how it was that, while professing Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence, India should yet have thought fit to resort to the use of force in Hyderabad. To those who knew the facts, the surprise was not that India had intervened but that Indict had not intervened much earlier. As long ago as 24 January, 1948, a minister of the Hyderabad Government, in tendering his resignation to the Prime Minister, had said:

"It pains me to be a member of a Government which allows looting, arson and murder unconcernedly; and that of my own brethren. The Bibinagar outrage, a report of which has been brought to me by a responsible person deputed by me especially for the purpose, has shocked me beyond all expression. I am certain about this: either we suppress this gangsterism ruthlessly, or we abdicate.

The Prime Minister, vainly attempting to persuade him to reconsider his

resignation, had written.

"I agree that there have been several unhappy incidents during the past few months, owing to various reasons."

Another minister of the Hyderabad Government, who had resigned on

23 July, 1948 had spoken of a complete reign of terror in certain districts, of men murdered, women dishonoured, houses burned.

In the face of this mounting evil, fomented by a clique of self-seekers, the choice before India had not been between violence and non-violence, but between the adoption of firm measures by the State against the evil-doer and the continuance of murder and arson and looting on a large scale directed against innocent men, women and children. After a series of warnings and appeals, India had chosen the former course and had intervened. It was significant that leading Muslims in all parts of India had welcomed the action taken by India in Hyderabad. That all resistance had collapsed within five days had been mainly due to the fact that the people of Hyderabad, irrespective of caste and creed, were behind India's action and had heartily welcomed the restoration of order.

She was well aware that phrases like "law and order" and "the will of the people" had often been used in the past, and were perhaps still being used by certain countries today, to cloak sinister designs. That had helped some people to spread libellous stories of India's coercion of a so-called weak and helpless State. She gave the assurance that India had no sinister designs and nothing to cloak. In the last twelve months India had realised, as few other countries had, the dangers of mass disorder and fratricidal strife, and its anxiety to root them out from a region situated in the very heart of its territory required no explanation. If they could be rooted out with the same speed from Palestine, Burma, Malaya and elsewhere, the world would be a happier and more secure place to live in.

Mrs. Pandit quoted, stating that comment was superfluous, from a published letter written in April 1948 by the then Governor-General of India, Lord Mountbatten, to His Exalted Highness, the

Nizam of Hyderabad:

"You will have noticed that during the course of the last few months, the ruler of nearly every State in this subcontinent which is in relationship with the Dominion of India has introduced, or has declared his intention of introducing in the near future, truly responsible and representative government. I say nearly every States, for there is one exception, Hyderabad. It is impossible for any fair-minded person in the outside world to view the present Government of Hyderabad but as one representing and indeed dominated by a party which commends support of only part of the minority community in the State; nor, to the best of my knowledge, is it responsible to the Legislature.

"I do not personally believe that friendly relations between India and Hyderabad, which we are agreed are the necessary prelude to a satisfactory long-term settlement, can come so long as the state of affairs to which I have referred above exists. I am not saying this as Governor-General of India. I am saying it as an impartial observer and as a well-wisher of Hyderabad."

Unfortunately, the appeal had fallen on deaf ears. But that already belonged to the dead past of history; she would not dwell on it.

The Prime Minister of India had made India's intentions clear in a recent broadcast: as soon as the immediate task of restoring normal conditions was completed, steps would be taken for the election of a constituent assembly which would determine the constitutional structures of Hyderabad. The election would doubtless be held under the same conditions as similar elections

elsewhere in India, on the basis of adult suffrage and with all the usual safeguards against intimidation and corrupt practices of all kinds. It would be just as public as any general election in the United Kingdom or the United States of America. India had nothing to hide. Its only desire was that the rule of law and the will of the people should prevail.

India had faith in democracy. Its allegiance to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations was not mere lip service. In a few weeks, India would be framing its new Constitution, embodying all the ideals of its new freedom. The main provisions had already been settled. It had taken from France the inspiring ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity-which, indeed, most countries had. It had taken from the United States of America the idea of a bill of rights enforceable by the courts. It had taken from the United Kingdom the idea of an independent judiciary, the bulwark of British freedom. It had taken from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics many provisions for the benefit of the common and forgotten man. Remembering that India was to be a secular State, it had provided every possible safeguard for the protection of minorities. Copying a step taken by the United States of America in 1946, it had provided for the periodic appointment of commissions to investigate the conditions of any under-privileged classes of the population. Anticipating one of the recommendations of the Civil Rights

Committee appointed in the United States of America, it had provided for the appointment, both for the Union of India and for each of the States, of special officers to see that the rights guaranteed by the Constitution were not violated in the day-to-day administration of the country. Adult suffrage for men and women was to be the basis of all elections.

In that and other ways, India had tried to do all it could to reaffirm its faith "in fundamental human rights, in the dignity

and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women..." and "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom."

Those were the words of the Charter, and India and shown, in the shaping of its Constitution that to it they were no empty phrases but a living inspiration. Nothing would deflect India from the resolute pursuit of those great ideals, neither adverse circumstances nor obloquy nor misunderstanding, because those ideals were in full accord with the noblest traditions of Indian culture.