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OPINION

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THE PUBLIC VOICE

"**S**O," said the pleasant-faced, middle-aged political scientist in the green and gold sari, looking up from her paper, "they're still making heavy weather over the non-aggression pact, both the Indian and Pakistani governments. Is it that governments by their very nature are suspicious of the simple, or is it that both are really opposed to the idea, and do not want, deep down in their hearts, to tie themselves to peace? You may say I must have a very cynical nature myself to think of the second alternative, but really the whole concept is so clear and straightforward that one cannot help wondering. What, when all is said and done, is a non-aggression pact? A promise by two countries not to attack one another. India promises Pakistan that it will not attack it. Pakistan promises India that it will not attack it. Now if both want peace, as both say emphatically they do, what is all the delay about, with the meetings at ministerial level, at official level, and thereafter, who knows, again at ministerial level and even prime ministerial level, perhaps? Why the waste of time and resources, the toing and froing of high dignitaries and their aides, the feasting that invariably seems to accompany such gatherings? Why not the signing by General Zia and Mrs. Indira Gandhi of a clear, one-sentence promise that for a specific period, say, ten or twenty years or more, their forces will not attack the other side? Other problems between the neighbouring countries, and where are they not in such circumstances, can be taken up separately and talked over."

"Ah, but you make me quite impatient with you," said the smart young secretary with the very impressive brief case, "we sign your simple non-aggression pact and Pakistan explodes a nuclear bomb. What then, my angel of peace?" "You're not proposing to go to war with Pakistan are you, if it explodes a nuclear bomb?" asked the bespectacled, hatchet-faced economic journalist from lower down in the queue. Then as the secretary shook her head in negation, "no, I thought not. Even the most chauvinistic amongst us wouldn't go as far as that. What difference then does our having signed the non-aggression pact make? We are not disadvantaged in any way." "The real answer to Pakistan's bomb is not to have no non-aggression pact with it, but to unveil your own nuclear bomb the moment Pakistan explodes its," said a luxuriously-moustached, white-haired old gentleman, leaning on a battered umbrella two places further down from the economic journalist. "I take it we're

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entered into a five-year agreement to supply masses of modern sophisticated weapons to Pakistan. Our signing the pact is not likely to affect that decision now. I know it is usual among us to regard the Americans as somewhat weak in the head, and unnecessarily brash. But though their Governments have from time to time been foolish—not as often as ours, though—on the whole they are a very shrewd lot, with a very active sense of where their real interest lies. We would be wise if we realised that instead of just shrieking at them all the time, and by the way, I mean particularly our government."

"I'll give you another reason why we should not sign any pact with the present Zia government. It is a thoroughly absolute arbitrary dictatorship, with the mass of the people against it, governing by sheer military force with no rule of law, no judicial independence, none of the freedoms. Have we no sense of shame that we propose to enter into an understanding with such a government?" asked the man in the long black coat. "Methinks you do protest too late, good sir," said the economic journalist. "Pakistan has been an absolute dictatorship for about the last twenty years, and successive Indian Governments have entered into agreements with it. Besides, if you object to tyrannies, what about Indira's very close friend, the greatest tyranny on earth, the Soviet Union, with which we actually have a treaty of friendship and mutual consultation? And so many of its satellites too, all tyrannies, all very good friends of our government. Why, having swallowed the camel, are you now straining at the gnat? And all our dear friends in Africa? Aren't most of them authoritarian, one-party states, also the majority in the non-aligned movement of which we are so proud of being a founder-member? This argument I'm afraid, can't stand."

"On the whole, we don't stand to lose anything by entering into a non-aggression pact, and we have at least a solemn written assurance from Pakistan that it will not attack us; though of course that may turn out to be just a scrap of paper. I wouldn't count on it very much. You know the old saying 'talk softly and carry the big stick.' If the stick we carry continues to be a little larger or even equal to that which Pakistan carries, the pact may well work out to the mutual benefit of both of us," said the political scientist. "Well, here comes the bus just in time." Thundering up to the terminus, the bus discharged its passengers and took on a new lot, including our discussants.

COMMENT

They say inflation is vanquished. We have done wonderfully, they tell us. But for every article in common use I pay more to-day than I did yesterday. So what use is it, your having done so wonderfully in economic terms, to me, the simple, ordinary citizen? A little common-sense, please.

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not going to go blind just because we've signed the non-aggression pact. We shall continue to watch Pakistan's every move, and keep up with it if we can, just as we're doing now. They've contracted for the F-16s; our counter is the Mirage-2000s. Again, people urge don't enter into the pact, because Pakistan may give a base to the Americans in its territory. If that happens, how are we disadvantaged if we have signed the pact? Not having signed, are we going to go to war on this account? Of course, not. Further about Kashmir being still unsettled. We would be better off not signing, if we intended to take over Azad Kashmir, so-called, now with Pakistan, by force of arms. Any intention of doing that we have disclaimed by 'bell, book and candle,' witness the Simla agreement. As it is, it's sad the problem remains but that need not affect the non-aggression pact. So, too, outstanding matters like visas, trade, places of pilgrimage, etc. For any of them, or all of them, to be settled in India's favour, so far as I can judge, is any sensible Indian, and there are many more such than most of us think, likely to want to go to war?"

"What you say is probably correct, I concede," said the young secretary. "We may suffer no loss by having this pact, but what do we gain? Why not leave things as they are? Our peaceful intentions are clear enough." "Are they? To ourselves, certainly. But to the rest of the world? Not so," said a rather handsome lady in a silk kaftan and embroidered slippers. "Recently, I was in several Western European countries, and quite a number of knowledgeable people were doubtful about our aims. Why did we want to disintegrate Pakistan, they asked. At my reasoned denials they smiled sicklily, and started on our close ties with Russia, and hence obviously our interest in Pakistan's downfall. As for the Middle East and the Arab countries we so assiduously, and on merits, support, with them it is almost an article of faith, an observant Arabic-knowing, long-term resident in many of them, a first cousin of mine, told me, that we are the most consummate hypocrites in the world, and are certainly planning Pakistan's destruction. He said he argued again and again, but the result was always disbelief, and whenever he quoted the Prime Minister, there was ironic laughter and statements like 'Oh, Indira, is she not known the world over as the authentic Mother of Hypocrisy'? So you see, there may be considerable gain in our entering into the pact. Which should also be clear from the fact that our leaders in the past offered it several times to Pakistan and its foolish governments refused."

"But Pakistan is only offering it now to show the Americans that our complaints about their being rearmed, dreading the weapons being turned against us, are quite baseless," said a tall thin man in a long black coat with a couple of fat books under his arm. 'Why should we, by signing the pact, assist it to deceive the Americans?' "Come, come," said a post-graduate student in a simple white sari and chappals, "you read the papers, don't you, and must know the Americans have already,

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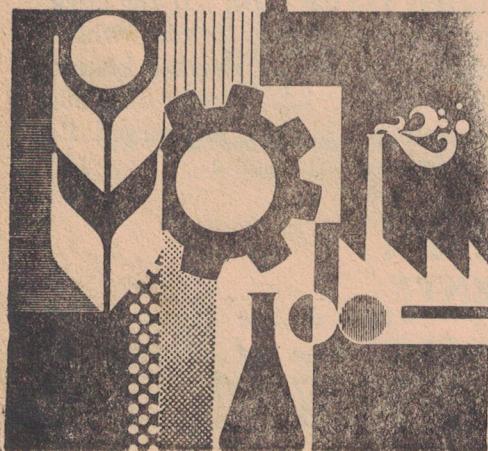
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"There are sciences of man as well as of non-human nature. Their method is the method of all the sciences. Where they differ from the other sciences is in the fact that the particular cases from which they abstract, and upon which they base their generalizations, posses intrinsic significance. Each one is a suffering or enjoying human being

"The sciences of men are necessary and valuable. But, like many necessary and valuable things, they easily lend themselves to undesirable uses. We dislike having other people's sufferings forced on our attention, we find it very often inconvenient to have to feel compassion. To feel compassion is to feel that we are in some sort and to some extent responsible for the pain that is being inflicted, that we ought to do something about it. But most of us have no taste for doing things about anything that is not our own immediate business. To be able to think about human affairs in terms of the bodiless abstractions, the unindividuated and unmoving generalizations invented by men of science, is a real godsend. You cannot feel pity for an abstraction. Abstraction serves, accordingly, as a refuge from emotional discomfort and moral responsibility."

* * *

"As I sat in the cafe I said to myself,
They may talk as they please about what they call pelf,
They may sneer as they like about eating and drinking,
But help it I cannot, I cannot help thinking

How Pleasant it is to have money, heigh ho !
How pleasant it is to have money."

54. Shri B. Venkatappiah,
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