

Leo Tolstoy  
A Letter to a Hindu  
The Subjection of India - its cause and cure  
14th December 1908

INTRODUCTION  
A LETTER TO A HINDU

All that exists is One; people only call this One by different names.

Veddas.

God is love, and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him.

1 Ep. John. Chap. 4.

God is one Whole; we are the parts.

Exposition of the teaching of the Veddas by Vivekananda.

I

Do not seek rest in that plane where the earthly gives birth to thoughts and desires, for if thou dost, thou wilt be dragged through the rough wilderness of life, which is not of Me. Whenever thou feelest that thy feet are becoming entangled in the interlaced roots of life, know then that thou hast strayed from the path to which I beckon thee, for I have placed thee in broad smooth paths which are strewn with flowers.

I have put a light before thee, which thou can'st follow and thus run without stumbling.

Krishna P. 212.

I received your letter and the two issues of the magazine. Both were intensely interesting to me; indeed, the oppression of a majority by the minority of a people and the corruption which flows from it, is a phenomenon which has always occupied my mind and at present is entirely occupying my attention. I will endeavour to convey to you what I think, both in a particular and a general way, about those causes from which those dreadful calamities have arisen and do arise, of which you write in your letter and which are also mentioned in the two numbers of the Hindoo magazine you sent me.

The causes, owing to which this astonishing spectacle arises, of the majority of the labouring classes submitting to a mere handful of idlers whom it permits to dispose not only of its labour but also of its very life, are always and everywhere the same; whether the oppressors and the oppressed belong to the same, or, as is the case in India and in other countries, where the dominant class belongs to an entirely different nation from those oppressed.

It appears especially strange of India, for here we have a people of 200 millions of individuals, highly endowed with spiritual and physical powers, in absolute subjection to a small clique, composed of persons utterly alien in thought and aspiration and altogether inferior to those whom they enslave.

These causes, as one can easily see from your letter, from the articles in «Free Hindustan», from the highly interesting writings of the Hindoo Swami Vivekananda and others, are in accord with that which causes the distress of all the peoples of our time; in the absence of a rational religious teaching which, while elucidating the meaning of life to the people in an equal way, would also make clear the higher law, which should be a guide to conduct, and in the substitution for them of the more than dubious propositions of a false religion and pseudo science, and in the immoral conclusions called civilization derived from both.

One has already seen not only from your letter and from the articles in «Free Hindustan», but also from the entire Hindoo political literature of our times, that the majority of the leaders of public opinion among the native races of India, while no longer ascribing any significance to those religious teachings which were professed, and are professed by the Hindoo peoples, now find the sole possibility of deliverance from the oppression they endure, in embracing those anti-religious and subtly immoral forms of social order in which the English and other pseudo Christian nations live to-day. Nothing shows more clearly than this, the total absence of religious consciousness in the minds of the present day leaders of Hindoo peoples, than does this tendency to instil into the hearts of the natives the acceptance of the forms of life in operation amongst European nations. Meanwhile, in the absence of this true religious consciousness and the guidance of conduct flowing from it, in the absence which is common in our times to all the nations of the East and the West, from Japan to England and America: lies the chief if not the sole cause of the enslavement of all the Indian peoples by the English.

## II

O ye, who see perplexities over your heads and beneath your feet, to the right and to the left! you will be an eternal enigma unto yourselves, until you become humble and joyful as children. Then you will find Me, and having found Me in yourselves, you will rule over worlds and looking out from the great world within to the little world without, you will bless everything that is and find all is well with time and with you.

Krishna P. 164.

In order to make my thoughts clear I must go back a considerable time.

We do not know, and cannot know (I boldly say – we need not) how

mankind lived millions, or even tens of thousands of years ago; but in all those times of which we have any reliable knowledge, we find that Humanity has lived in separate tribes, clans, nations, in which the majority, submitting to the apparently inevitable, has permitted the coercive rule of one, or several persons of the minority. We know this beyond a doubt. Notwithstanding the external diversity of events and persons, such an organisation of human life has manifested itself in a similar way, in all the countries of whose previous history we know anything. And such an order of life, the further back you go, was always looked upon as the necessary basis for concordent social intercourse by both the rulers and the ruled.

Thus it was everywhere. But in spite of such an external order of life having existed for centuries and continuing even until now, a long time ago – thousands of years before our time, in the midst of different nations and often from out of the very centre of this order of life resting on coercion, one and the same thought has been expressed, – that in every individual one spiritual source manifests itself, which is life itself, and that this Spiritual source tends to unification with everything which is homogeneous with it, and attains this unification by love. This thought in its various forms has been expressed with more or less completeness and lucidity at different times and in various places. It has been expressed in Brahminism, Judaism, Mazdeism (the teaching of Zoroaster), Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, in the writings of the Greek and Roman sages, and in Christianity and Mohammedanism. Already the fact that one and the same thought has been expressed in the midst of the most diverse nations and at different times and places, indicates that this thought was inherent in human nature and contained the truth in itself.

But this truth appeared to those who considered that the only possible way of uniting people into societies, was violence on the part of one set to others to be in opposition to the existing order, and, moreover, at the time of its first appearance, it was expressed in such a vague fragmentary manner, that although the people embraced it as a theory, they were unable to accept it as an authoritative guidance for conduct. Besides, in regard to all the expressions of this truth as it was gradually proclaimed amongst people whose life was founded on violence, always occurred one and the same thing, vis. those who enjoyed the benefits derived from power finding that the recognition by the people of this truth undermined their position, consciously or unconsciously distorted this truth by every means in their power, attaching to it attributes and meanings totally foreign to it, and also opposed its dissemination by downright violence. Thus the truth which is so natural to humanity – that human life should be guided by the spiritual principle which is the foundation of human life and manifests itself in love, – in order to enter man's consciousness had to struggle not only with the incompleteness of its expression and the intentional and unintentional distortions of it, but also with deliberate violence which compels by means of punishments and persecutions the acceptance of that explanation of the religious law established by the authorities, which is opposed to this truth. Such

a misrepresentation and obscuration of the new but as yet imperfectly explained truth, took place everywhere, in Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, in Mohammedanism and also in your Brahminism.

### III

My hand has sowed love everywhere, giving unto all that will receive. Blessings are offered unto all my children, but many times in their blindness they fail to see them. How few there are who gather the gifts which lie in profusion at their feet; how many there are who, in wilful waywardness, turn their eyes away from them and complain with a wail that they have not that which I have given them! Many of them defiantly repudiate not only my Gifts, but Me also, Me, the Source of all blessings and the Author of their Being.

Krishna P. 161.

O, tarry awhile from the turmoil and strife of the world. I will beautify and quicken thy life with love and with joy, for the light of the Soul is love. Where love is there is contentment and peace, and where there is contentment and peace there am I also in their midst.

Krishna P. 163–164.

The aim of the Sinless One consists in acting without causing sorrow to others, although he could attain to great power by ignoring their feelings.

The aim of the Sinless one lies in not doing evil unto those who have done evil unto him.

If a man causes suffering even to those who hate him without any reason, he will ultimately have grief not to be overcome.

The punishment of evil doers consists in making them feel ashamed of themselves by doing them a great kindness.

Of what use is superior knowledge in the one, if he does not endeavour to relieve his neighbour's wants as much as his own?

If, in the morning a man wishes to do evil unto another, in the evening the evil will return to him.

Hindoo Kural.

This has taken place everywhere. The fact that love is the highest moral feeling was accepted universally, but the truth itself was interwoven with many and varied falsehoods, which so distorted it, that nothing but mere words remained, out of this recognition of love as the highest moral feeling. The theory was advanced that this highest moral feeling is applicable only to the individual life, that it was good only for home use, – but in social life all forms

of violence, prisons, executions, wars, involving acts diametrically opposed to the feeblest sensation of love, were regarded as indispensable for the protection of the majority against evil doers. Notwithstanding that common sense clearly indicates, that if one set of people can arrogate to themselves the right to decide as to which people are to be subjected to all kinds of coercion for the supposed welfare of the many, it naturally follows that those few individuals to whom violence is so applied could also come to the same conclusion with regard to the ruling caste which subjected them to violence: and although the great religious teachers, – Brahmin, Buddhist and especially Christian, – anticipating this perversion of the law of love, directed attention to the one inevitable condition of love: the enduring of affronts, injuries, all kinds of violence without resisting the evil by evil, – mankind continued to accept what was incompatible: the beneficence of love, and with it the resistance of evil by violence, which is and must be opposed to love. And such teachings, in spite of the palpable contradiction which is in them, have taken such a deep hold upon the people, that while believing in the beneficency of love, people fail to question the lawfulness of an order of life founded on coercion, which includes the imposition not only of tortures but also of death, by some persons upon others.

For a long time people lived in this obvious contradiction without noticing it. But the day came when this contradiction began to stagger the more thoughtful people of different nations. And the ancient simple truth that it was natural for people to help and to love, instead of torturing and killing each other, began to dawn upon the minds of men and became every day clearer, while the acceptance of those false interpretations by which the deviations from it were justified, became less and less convincing.

In ancient times the chief justification of violence was the theory that so-called monarchs, tsars, sultans, rajahs, shahs, and other heads of states had peculiar and Divine rights. But the longer people lived, the faith in special rights of monarchs sanctioned by God, became weaker and weaker. This faith declined in equal degree and almost simultaneously in the Christian, in the Brahman, in the Buddhist and in the Confucian spheres, and it has recently become so feeble that it can no longer serve, as it did before, as a justification of acts openly opposed to common sense and to the true religious feeling. People saw more and more distinctly, and to-day the majority see quite clearly the absurdity and the immorality of the submission of one's will to that of others like oneself, who require of them actions not only contrary to their material welfare but which are also a violation of their moral feelings. It is, therefore, perfectly natural that people who have lost faith in the supported by religion divinity of the authority of all manner of potentates, should endeavour to free themselves from it. But unfortunately during the domination of those monarchs, considered to be Divinely appointed beings, established themselves near the courts, an ever increasing number of persons, which under the guise of governing the people lived upon their labours. And this governing class took care that as soon as the old religious fraud about divine

rule of monarchs should cease to be believed by people another and similar deception should take its place and continue in the same way as the old one to keep nations in slavery to a limited number of rulers.

#### IV

Children, do you want to know by what your hearts should be guided? Throw aside your longings and strivings after that which is null and void; get rid of your erroneous thoughts about happiness, and wisdom, and your empty and insincere desires. Dispense with these and you will know love.

Krishna P. 171.

Be not the destroyers of yourselves. Arise to your true Being, and then you will have nothing to fear.

Krishna P. 177.

New vindications of the power of potentates have replaced the obsolete ones. These justifications are as groundless as those they superseded but they are still new; hence their inconsistency cannot at once be quite clear to the majority, and, besides, the people who make use of power propagate them and support them in such a skilful manner that these justifications appear to many as quite incontrovertible, even to those who suffer from what they justify. These new vindications are termed scientific.

«Scientific» is a word that has for the majority the same power as has the word «religious». As all that was called religious for the simple reason that it was called religious implied [that it] should be always the truth, exactly in the same way all that is called scientific for the simple reason that it is called Science, is always regarded [as] undoubtedly true. Thus, in this case the outlived religious justification of violence which consisted in the recognition of the peculiarity and divinity of personages being in power and put in power by God («there is no power but from God») was replaced by the justification consisting in the first place of the fact, that as amongst people, the coercion of some by others has always been, it is proved that such violence must continue indefinitely. In this, i. e. that mankind should not live according to reason and conscience, but in obedience to that which has for a long time been taking place amongst them, – in this is embodied what «Science» terms the «historical law». The second «scientific» justification is, that as amongst plants and animals a struggle or existence goes on which always culminates in the survival of the fittest, the same struggle should go on amongst men (notwithstanding that men are beings endowed with the attributes of reason and love, faculties which are absent from beings submitting to the law of struggle and selection). In this consists the second «scientific» justification of violence.

The third scientific justification of violence the most prominent,

and unfortunately the most widespread, is in reality the oldest religious justification only a little altered which is the theory that the use of violence in social life against some, for the welfare of others is inevitable, and, however desirable love amongst people might be, coercion is indispensable. The difference between the justification of violence by pseudo science and that of pseudo religion is in the fact that to the question, «Why such and such people, and not others, have the right to decide as to whom violence may and must be used against», – science does not give the same reply as that which religion had formulated: that these decisions are just because they are pronounced by personages who possess a divine power, but that these decisions represent the will of the majority, which, under a constitutional form of government is supposed to express itself in all the decisions and actions of the party who at any given time is in power.

Such are the scientific vindications of coercion. These vindications, although quite groundless, are so necessary to people occupying privileged positions that they as implicitly believe in them, and as confidently propagate them, as they formerly did the doctrine of the immaculate conception.

Meantime the unhappy majority weighed down by toil, is so dazzled by the display which accompanies the propagation of these «scientific truths», that, under this new influence it accepts them as readily as it formerly accepted the pseudo religious justifications and continues to submit slavishly to new potentates who are just as cruel as the former one, but who have some what increased in number.

V

Who am I? I am that which thou hast searched for since thy baby eyes gazed wonderingly upon the world, whose horizon but hides this real life from thee. I am that which in thy heart thou hast prayed for, demanded as thy brithright, although thou hast not known what it was. I am that which has lain in thy soul for hundreds and thousands of years. Sometimes I lay in thee grieving, because thou didst not recognise me; sometimes I raised my head, opened my eyes, and extended my arms calling thee either tenderly and quietly, or strenuously, demanding that thou should'st rebel against the hard iron earth-chains which held thee bound to clay.

Krishna P. 192.

Thus it has been, and still is, going on in the Christain world. One could hope that in the vast Brahmin, Buddhist, Confucian worlds this new scientific superstition would not have place, and that the Chinese, the Japanese, the Hindoos, having seen the falsity of religious impositions which justify violence, would proceed direct to the conception of the law of love inherent in humanity, which has been so clearly enunciated by the great teachers of the East. But it appears that the scientific superstition which replaced the religious one, is getting a firmer and firmer grip upon the Oriental nations. It has now a specially strong hold on the land of the

extreme East, Japan, not only upon its leaders but on the majority of its people and is the precursor to the greatest calamities. It has taken hold of China with her 400 millions of inhabitants, and also of your India with her 200 millions, or at least the bulk of the people who look upon themselves, as you do, as the leaders of these peoples.

In your magazine you insert as the basis principle which should direct the activity of your people the following thought as an epigraph: «Resistance to aggression is not simply justifiable but imperative; non resistance hurts both Altruism and Egoism».

You say that the English have enslaved and keep the Hindoos in subjection because the latter have not resisted sufficiently, and do not resist the violence by force.

But it is just the contrary. If the English have enslaved the Hindoos, it is just because the Hindoos recognised and do recognise coercion as the main and fundamental principle of their social order: in the name of this principle they submitted to their little Radjas, in their name they struggled with each other, fought with Europeans, with the English, and at present are preparing to a struggle with them again.

A commercial company enslaved a nation comprising 200 millions. Tell this to a man free from superstition and he will fail to grasp what these words mean. What does it mean that thirty thousand people not athletes, but rather weak and illooking have enslaved 200 millions of vigorous, clever, strong, freedom-loving people? Do not the figures make it clear that not the English, but the Hindoos, have enslaved themselves?

For the Hindoos to complain that the English have enslaved them, is equal to people who are addicted to drink, complaining that vendors of wine, who have settled in their midst, have enslaved them. You tell them that they can abstain from drinking, but they answer that they are so accustomed to it that they cannot abstain, that they find it necessary to keep up their energy by wine. Is not that the case with all the people, with millions of people who submit to thousands and hundreds of individuals, either of their own nation or of foreign nations?

If the Hindoos have been enslaved by violence it is because they themselves have lived by violence, live by violence, and do not recognise the eternal law of love, inherent in humanity.

«Pitiful and ignorant is the man who seeks what he has already got, but is unaware that he has it. Yes, pitiful and ignorant is the man who does not know the bliss of that love which surrounds him, which I gave him» (Krishna).

If man lives only in accord with the law of love which includes non resistance, which has been already revealed to him and is natural to his heart, and hence does not participate in any form of violence,

not only hundreds will not enslave millions but even millions will be unable to enslave one individual. Do not resist evil, but also yourselves participate not in evil, in the violent deeds of the administration, of the law courts, the collection of taxes, and what is most important of the soldiers, and no one in the world will enslave you.

Love is the only means of saving people from all disasters which he may undergo. In your case the only means of liberating your people from slavery lies in love. Love as the religious foundation of human life was proclaimed with striking force and lucidity in the midst of your people in remote antiquity. Love, without non-resistance is a contradiction in itself. And there, in the 20th century you, a member of one of the most religious of peoples, with a light heart and with confidence in your scientific enlightenment and hence in your undoubted righteousness – you deny this law, repeating – pardon me – that colossal error which they, the defenders of violence, the enemies of the truth, at first the servants of theology, then of science, your European teachers, have instilled into you.

VI

O, ye who sit in bondage, and continually seek and pant for freedom, seek only love. Love is peace in itself and peace which gives complete satisfaction. I am the key that opens to the rarely discovered land where contentment alone is found.

Krishna P. 167.

To the humanity of our times, Eastern or Western, the same thing happens which takes place in regard to every individual when he is passing from one age to the other (a child becoming a youth, a youth a man) and loses that which has been hitherto his guide in life, and not having elucidated a new one appropriate to his age, lives without any guidance and invents various anxieties, cares, amusements, provocations, untoxications, to distract his attention from the misery and selfishness of his own life. Such a condition may last a long time.

But as during the transition of an individual from one age to another, the time must inevitably come when life can no longer continue in the old ruts as before, in senseless anxiety and irritation, and the man must understand that the previous guidance for life is no longer applicable to him, – it does not follow that he must necessarily live without any rational guidance whatever, but that he should formulate for himself a theory of life corresponding to his age, and having elucidated it, he should in his new age be guided by it.

Similar crises must of necessity occur in the ever changing life of humanity. And I am of opinion that the time has arrived for such a transition of humanity from one age to another, and not in the sense that it has arrived now, vis. 1908, but that the inherent contradiction of human life; the consciousness of the beneficence of

the law of love, and the system of life built upon the law of violence opposed to love in our time has reached that degree of intensity under which it can no longer go on, and must be met by a solution, and evidently not with a solution which favours the outlived law of violence, but in favour of the truth that the law of human life is the law of love, cherished by all humanity from the most remote antiquity.

The recognition of this truth in its full significance is possible for men, only when they free themselves completely from all religious, as well as scientific superstitions by means of which it has been for centuries hidden from mankind.

In order to save a sinking ship it is necessary to throw overboard the ballast, which though it might have been indispensable at one time, would now cause destruction. It is exactly the same with religious and scientific superstitions which hide this salutary truth from men. In order that people could embrace the truth, not in such a vague way as it presented itself to them during their childhood, nor in such a onesided, unstable way as it was interpreted to them by religious and scientific teachers, but in such a manner that it should become the highest law of human life; to effect this, the complete liberation of this truth from all, all those superstitions pseudo religious as well as pseudo scientific which now obscure it, is necessary, not a partial, timid liberation, such a one as in the religious sphere was effected by Guru-Nanaka, the founder of the religion of the Sakas, and in Christianity by Luther, or similar reformers in other religions, but a complete deliverance of the religious truth from all those ancient religious, as well as from the modern scientific superstitions.

If people only freed themselves from beliefs in all kinds of Ormuzds, Brahmas, Sabbaoths, their incarnation in Krishnas and Christs, from beliefs in a paradise and hell, in angels and demons, from reincarnations, resurrections, from the idea of the interference of God in the life of the universe; free themselves chiefly from the recognition of the infallibility of the various Vedas, Bibles, Gospels, Triptakas, Korans, etc.; if people only freed themselves also from blindly believing in all sorts of scientific doctrines about infinitesimally small atoms, molecules, about all kinds of infinitely great and infinitely remote worlds, about their movements and their origin, about forces; from the implicit faith in all manner of theoretical scientific laws to which man is supposed to be subjected – the historic and economic laws, the laws of straggle and survival etc., – if people only freed themselves from this terrible accumulation of the idle exercises of our lower capacities of mind and memory which are called the Sciences, from all the innumerable divisions of all sorts of histories, anthropologies, homiletics, bacteriologies, jurisprudences, cosmographies, strategies, their name is legion; if people only relieve themselves of this ruinous intoxicating ballast, – that simple, explicit law of love accessible to all, which is so natural to mankind, solving all questions and perplexities, will of its own accord become clear and obligatory.

## VII

Children, look at the flowers at your feet; do not trample upon them. Look at the love in your midst and do not repudiate it.

Krishna P. 178.

There is a higher reason which transcends all human minds. It is far and near. It permeates all the worlds and at the same time is infinitely higher than they.

A man who sees that all things are contained in the higher spirit, cannot treat any being with contempt.

For him to whom all spiritual beings are equal to the highest, there can be no room for deception or grief.

Those who are ignorant and are devoted to the religious rites only, are in a deep gloom, but those who are given up to fruitless meditations are in a still greater darkness.

Upanishads, from Vedas.

Yes, in our time, men – to escape from self inflicted calamities which have reached the highest degree of intensity: whether it be a Hindoo seeking liberation from the subjugation of the English, or any other man in his struggle with those using violence – whether in the negro's fights with the North American, or the Persian's, Russian's or the Turk's fight with his Government, as well as any man who seeks the greatest amount of welfare for himself as well as for everybody – do not require new explanations and justifications of old religious superstitions, as Vivekanandas, Baba Bharatis and others have formulated in your country, and in the Christian world; an infinite number of such new interpreters and expounders of what no one stands in need; nor the innumerable sciences about matters which not only are unnecessary but mostly harmful (in the spiritual realm there is nothing indifferent, but what is not useful is always harmful). The Hindoo, as well as the Englishman, the Frenchman, the German, the Russian, do not require constitutions, revolutions, any conferences, congresses, any new ingenious devices for submarine navigation, aerial navigation, powerful explosives, or all kinds of conveniences for the enjoyment of the rich ruling classes; not new schools, universities with instruction in innumerable sciences, not the augmentation of papers and books, and gramophones and cinematographs, not those childish and mostly corrupt stupidities which are called arts; but one thing only is needful: the knowledge of that simple lucid truth – that the law of human life is the law of love, which gives the highest happiness to every individual, as well as to all mankind. If people only free themselves in their consciousness from those mountains of nonsense which hide the truth from them; and that indubitable eternal truth inherent to mankind which is one and the same in all the great religions of the world, will inevitably enter the soul of every man. And as soon as this is

acknowledged by the great majority, stupidity which now conceals it will disappear and with it will by itself disappear all the evils from which humanity now suffers.

«Children, look upwards with your beclouded eyes, and a world full of joy and love will disclose itself to you, a rational world made by my wisdom, the only real world. Then you will know what love has done with you, what love has bestowed upon you, and what love demands from you» (Krishna).

Dec. 14th, 1908.

Yasnaya Poliana.