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Indian World View and Environmental Crisis

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Environmental crisis is no longer impending. It is already here. Those concerned with it are growing in number. They come from all age groups, walks of life, and regions of the world.

Search for a paradigm and policy to get over the problem and ward off any further deterioration in our living environment has been on for quite some time but the success is limited, if at all. Economic development still is the top priority and if in the process of growth, ecology suffers, it must be treated as an opportunity cost, so goes the thinking. Economy and ecology are two sides of the same coin but not in the western model of development. It believes in analysis, in specialization and in linear growth. The search for a way out is still on within the framework of western thinking.

The dominant groups in all countries of the world still subscribe to the view that human ingenuity will triumph and man would one day have complete control over nature. Science and technology would help man get over whatever hurdles come in the way of material advancement. They also believe that progress has inbuilt opportunity costs. Humanity has always paid a price for progress. How else man could come out of his animal existence? The environmental crisis that has gripped the world today is nothing but the cost of progress. Man cannot avoid it, but he can certainly minimize it. So goes the thinking.

This paper explores the potentials of the Indian worldview, which ensures development without adversely affecting the environment. It does not consider development and ecology as antithetical to each other. It is possible to promote material welfare without adversely affecting the environmental quality.

Indian Worldview

India's written history goes back to over 5000 years. Archaeological records take this culture further back to several millennia. Its philosophy, grand narratives, religion, history, values and ethical standards have reverence for all that exists in nature so much so that it evolved the concept of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the whole world constitutes a family). This cultural dictum was accepted not only by the Hindus but also by the other co-religionists. Even the religions, which originated outside India, were deeply influenced by it. 'Live and let live' has been the core belief of Indian culture. The question is: can the Indian worldview as evident from its cultural heritage be used as a paradigm to create what Gandhi called 'modem civilization', a civilization, which treats nature as a source of life and not only as a source of livelihood.

Indian culture as it evolved during the last five millennia is deeply rooted in two different but interdependent traditions. The Aryan tradition had its sway in the Indus and upper Ganga valleys while the Dravidian tradition in India, developed South of the Vindhyas. The cultures ultimately merged to produce the well-known Indus Civilization and thereafter, the Vedic and Post-Vedic civilizations of India. Some of the statuettes and seals found in Mohenjodaro and Harappa, now in Pakistan, and parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan in India point to the fact that some of the basic ingredients of Indian civilization as we notice in later periods were present in their incipient forms even then. The statuette of Mother found in Mohenjodaro points to a concept that gave rise to the concept of Mother Earth or *Shakti*, *Kali* and *Durga*.

Let us explore more deeply the continuity of the main currents of Indian civilization from ancient most times to this day.

Origin of Life

All life found on the earth has a common source i.e. God. There is 'One without the second' say the Upanishads. The source of life is One and One alone. "All this is Brahma, Brahma is devoid of any attribute. Nothing can be positively postulated about Him. He can be indicated only by 'not this, not this." Hence, He is perceived by different people differently depending upon past experiences. When these various perceptions are concretised into thoughts they give rise to different philosophical and religious traditions. Religions are nothing but different paths to arrive at the same Reality. No religion is therefore superior to the other. All are in search of the same reality. Religions should, therefore, unite all the peoples irrespective of their origin, mode of expression and rituals.

The Brahma reveals Himself in two forms: in the unconscious, non-Self *(achetan)* form that we call matter and conscious, Self *(chetan)* form that we call *Atma* or soul. The Non-Self is transitory; the Self is eternal. The non-Self ends to re-emerge in other forms, the Self remains indestructible for it is the part of the Universal Self or *Parmatma*. It cannot be reduced or expanded, nor can it be destroyed.

Unity of life is one of the basic tenets of Indian civilization. It is not only the human life. All life forms, from single cell amoeba to human beings, are united; they have a common origin and a common destiny even if they were born differently as:

1. *Jarayuja* (viviparous);
2. *Andaja* (oviparous);
3. *Udbhijas* (germinating); and
4. *Swedaja* (generated by heat and moisture).

The Jarayuja are born of placenta like human beings and animals; the Andaja are born of eggs like birds and reptiles; the Udbhijas sprout through the soil; and Swedjas are born of heat and moisture like bacteria. The inorganic matter (*Jada*) does not fall in any of the above four categories for it only forms the base for the creation of life. Indian civilization considered plants as living species, and the same was confirmed by modern science in twentieth century.

The creation, according to Hindu thought, is not accidental nor it is purposeless. The Brahma did not create the

universe; He is Himself the universe for He is a *Shakti*, a Cosmic Law, which has all the ingredients of the universe in Him. Just as a small seed, gives rise to a huge tree, so a minute invisible bi of Brahma gives rise to the universe. The size, shape and structure of the tree and its each leaf and twig is ingrained in the seed; so also the size, shape and structure of the universe is inherent in Brahma's *Shakti*. Gandhi called this Shakti the Cosmic Law.

Like the universe, life too is not purposeless. It entered first into a single cell bacterium, which evolved in due course of time to become Homo sapiens with a brain of a size and complexity that could produce a self energized and propelled super-computer. The journey from bacterium to Homo sapiens was long and tortuous but the goal appears to have been set i.e. to bring into a being a super-conscious creature able to know its Creator.

Concept of Progress

The concept of progress envisaged by Indian civilization is different from the one in vogue today. Progress in modern sense essentially means material advancement and all that goes with it. It is often measured in terms of how much money one has. A progressive society is one, which promotes material development. It is presumed that the economically well off would be a satisfied and happy people. So more wealth one has, the happier he is. And since man has eternally been in search of happiness, it is the duty and responsibility of all societies, peoples and nations to work to accelerate the growth of Gross Domestic Product, which in turn accelerates the growth of per capita income. All those who have more income would be happier. As the GDP grows, more of the people would have more income, and thus all the people would be happier than before and there would be no unhappiness in the world. So goes the logic.

There are two flaws in this argument. First, happiness is the function of the state of mind, not the amount of goods and services consumed. How else can one explain increasing rates of suicide among the rich people in the world - the people who have all the physical comforts and luxuries for body welfare. Material development alone is not enough to be happy. And second, man is not a machine; he is the most evolved species among the living things. He has body, mind and soul. The first is essentially natural like the body of any other living thing. Being formed of material substances, it decays through time and ultimately gets recycled in the earth of which it is a part. The mind helps the body to perceive the environment, both physical and spiritual. It is invisible but knowable. It stores experiences and knowledge and gives meaning to one's life and the world in which it lives. The soul i.e. *Atma*, links the body, which encases the mind, to its Creator (*Parmatma*). It is a part of the Creator, which is none other than a Cosmic Law or Truth as Gandhi proclaimed. Various religions give this Law a name: God, Bhagawan, Khuda, and so on. The Soul exists or not is a question that is difficult to answer for it cannot be seen; it is beyond material body and logical mind to know. To know the Soul one has to transcend the material and psychic to achieve higher level of consciousness. One has to merge into the whole. Religion would lose its meaning

if the existence of soul is denied. Material advancement improves body welfare; logic perfects the mind to analyse but neither of them, jointly or individually, knows the soul as long as they are self-centred. Soul is beyond material existence as also beyond logic. It is all pervading; it is present in all that lives and all lives has a common origin and hence all life is one

Indian culture has different concept of progress or development. It is called *Kushala* and *Mangalya*. *Kushala* means body welfare; *Mangalya* conveys the meaning of bliss i.e. inner happiness. Together, they mean blissful material advancement of all. Development is complete only if the whole environment in which man lives is harmonious. Not only are individuals satisfied; others around them should also be satisfied. If others are unhappy, the happiness of a single individual is meaningless. It lays emphasis on collectivity. The collective includes not only the human beings but also the animals, birds and plants.

The modern concept of development is man centred. It is greed based and hence each one tries to enhance his welfare often at the cost of others. Development pitches man against man, man against animals and man against nature. To secure development, people are prepared to kill and maim their fellow beings and other life forms. Species after species of animals and plants are going extinct. Wars are fought to protect rights over properties. People have gone so wild that they indulge in terrorism to revenge the alleged wrongs done to them; and that too in the name of religion.

Development has let loose a situation in which some are winners and some losers; some are tormentors and some tormented; and some are rich and some are poor. The strong are winners and weak are losers. Development has destroyed nature to the extent that it is no longer able to sustain life in its pristine exuberance and health. There is a lurking fear that climatic change caused by development may destroy all that development has given to man. In fact it may herald the end of life on planet earth.

The Indian concept of development calls for a win-win situation, a situation wherein all cooperate to live harmoniously and blissfully. The evolution of species leading to the emergence of man was possible because of cooperation and sacrifice for a cause, which was ingrained in each cell of each living being. And further evolution of man from the conscious to super-conscious stage will be possible only through cooperation and sacrifice, not through competition and killing spree.

Indian culture is thus not human centred; it is life centred to begin with. As such nothing should be done that would jeopardize life on planet earth. It does not prohibit the use of nature; in fact it encourages its use but in a form that keeps it healthy i.e. its vitality is not sapped. A farmer, for example, can cut trees provided that he plants more trees. It is the duty of the farmer to plant trees; the right to cut emanates from the duty to plant. Other life forms use only that much of the plants as to meet their basic needs. Man alone uses them for comforts and luxuries and very often to satisfy his greed for money.

Systems View of Nature

Yatha pinde tatha brahmande, say the Upanishads. The nature functions like a set of systems that ranges from the universe to a single cell and its constituents like minute organelles and bio machines. In between are *biosphere,* species like Homo sapiens, individual human beings, the organs of which their bodies consists of, tissues and finally the cells. Each of them constitutes a subsystem of a larger system, all of them interlinked horizontally as well as vertically to each other form ng a web of millions of connections. Nothing stands alone and the only way everything can prosper and play its assigned role is to follow the Cosmic Law, which consists of the following seven principles that constitute the bedrock of all stable organic systems:

1. Change beyond the Threshold Limit is controlled by Negative Feedback;
1. Efficient Functioning and Physical Growth go together. They one Interdependent;
2. Nature is not marked by Specialization. Multiple Use is the Law;
3. Conservation of Energy. The Force applied from outside is diverted, not combated;
2. Production without Waste – Everything is recycled;
4. Symbiotic Relationship, both Vertical and Horizontal; and
3. Biology of Nature and Man go together.

All that exists in nature is essential for life. Had nature not evolved the way it has, life would have not been possible on planet earth in the form we see it today. All that exists in nature is therefore sacred; it has to be preserved. Modification can and must be made but they must be within the threshold limits. Ocean has given the poison as well as the nectar; Himalaya is the abode of Lord Shiva who represents welfare of all (through the control of the climatic forces) as well as destruction (earthquakes, floods and droughts); Ganga is the mother for it has given so much for life to prosper; cow and certain trees are sacred, for all that is living is essential for human life. The concepts of *Kamadhenu* and *Kalpvriksha* (the animal, and the tree that provides everything man desires) are there not only in Indian culture but in other cultures too.

If we study the *Dashawatara*, we find that God came in different forms. *Geeta* proclaims that God is like the banyan among the trees. His first *Awatara* was *Matsya* (fish) for life emerged in water first and fish is the first life form, which had developed enough brain to think and feel. Next came the Tortoise, which lived in water but came out on the land too. Boar, which lived on land but enjoyed water too was next to follow. Half-lion and half human form (*Narsimha*) came next. And then came *Parashuram* who used weapons to set things right. He was followed by Ram; who was the embodiment of a person who cared for all irrespective of his social or economic status and who symbolized sacrifice in order that others may live happily. Krishna was the embodiment of Love, and Buddha of non-violence. They all showed the way to evolve into what we may call super-human beings, not in physical but in spiritual terms.

Modern civilization, proud as it is of its scientific and technological achievements,

is ever engaged in developing methods and processes to uncover the secrets of nature and to use the knowledge so gained to control the nature. But nature is elastic only to a certain limit; beyond the limit, it is brittle. Once it breaks; it becomes devastating. The Rig Veda, the ancient most written treatise, calls it *R'ta*.

'The processes whose perpetual sameness or regular occurrence gives rise to the representation of order, obey R'ta or their occurrence is R'ta', says Maurice Bloomfield. *'We read in the Vedas that 'rivers flow R'ta. According to the R'ta, the light of the heaven born morning has come.... The year is the Path of R'ta. The gods themselves are born of the R'ta or in the R'ta; they show by the acts that they know, observe and love the R'ta. In man' activity, the R'ta manifests itself as the moral law. "(Rig Veda)* Gandhi called it the Cosmic Law, which in human terms is the law of Dharma or Truth.

To enjoy the privileges of nature's bounties, man must obey the R'ta: 'for one who lives according to the Eternal Law the winds are full of sweetness, the rivers pour sweet. So may the plants be full of sweetness for us' says *Rishi Atharva*, the first deep ecologist of the world. We have polluted the air, contaminated the water and cleared the plants. We can now see the consequences of our deeds.

The concept of the Eternal Law is found in Buddhism and several other religions. When the Lama turns the prayer wheel in motion, he reminds us the R'ta. As Jane Harrison notes "He finds himself in sympathetic - touch with the Wheel of the Universe when he performs the act *'Dharmachakrapravartana'* (Setting the Wheel of Justice in Motion). He dare not turn the wheel contrariwise, lest that were to upset the whole order of the nature."

Raphael Patai (1947) in *Man and Temple in Ancient Jewish Myth Rituals* says: "The fact that primitive man draws no strict line of cleavage between the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms on the one hand and human beings on the other, has been so often emphasised that it can be regarded as anthropological commonplace." And Jane Harrison (1927) *in Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of the Greek Religion*, says "To man in the totemistic stage of thinking, Dike and Themis, natural order and social order, are not distinguished not even distinguishable. Plants and animals are parts of this group, a factor in his social structure. It is not that he takes them under his protection; they are his equals, his fellow tribesmen; naturally they obey the same laws."

Unlike the other cultures, Indian culture had no interruptions and hence the concept of nature as a living system was never abandoned. No wonder then that Indian culture is considered *Sanatana*, never ending. According to the Indian cultural tradition all that exists in nature is formed by the following five ingredients (*panchabhootas*):

1. Land;
2. Water;
3. Fire (energy);
4. Air;
5. Space (ether).

And after death or destruction everything gets converted into these very ingredients. Our bones constitute the Earth, the blood, the Water, the oxygen we breathe in represents the Air, the food represents

Energy and the influence of the outer space on us represents the Space.

Concept of Mother Earth

The *Prithivi Sukta* of *Atharva Veda* is devoted to Earth. When the disciple asks the nature of relationship between us, the human beings and the earth, which sustains us, the *Rishi Atharva* says: "*Mata Bhumih Putroham Prithivyaha (*Earth is the Mother and we are her Children*).*

When the pupil asks about the nature of the Earth, the *Rishi* says, *"The Earth has hills, snow covered mountains, it has dense forests and soils of different colours; it is the mother of herbs, it has fire inside and also gets energy from the sun; it produces a special odour, which enriches all that exists and grows on it. ... To protect us from all that is evil, the Earth contains pure water. It purifies all that is impure. It produces good harvest for us. It cleans everything that goes in it. Earth is real purifier of all that is undesirable and unclean. Let us not hurt its vitals and its heart. Let us use it judiciously. "*

And he adds: "the Earth is full of variety; it contains people speaking different dialects and speeches and diverse religious customs; each living according to what they think is right. Earth contains innumerable valuable things. It bears different varieties of trees and plants. We should pay homage to that Earth."

Jana Vibhrati Bahudha Vivasharsam
Nana Dharmanam Prithivi Yathokasam
Sahasradhara Dravinasya me thudham
Dhruven dhanuren parasfuranti

The Prithivi Sukta of Atharva Veda represents the main current of Indian thought on man's relations with the earth. The post-Vedic literature, especially the Jain and Buddhist literature, is imbued with reverence, love and compassion for nature, unity of life and unity of living (*chetan*) and non-living (*jada*). The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* has captured the essence of this unity and integration when it tells the people to salute the God who exists in everything - in fire, in water, in medicines, in vegetation and in the whole universe.

Yo devo ague yo apmu yo vishvam
bhuvanamavi vesa

Ya Aushadhishu yo vanaspatishu tasme
devaya namo namah

(God who is fire, who is in water, who pervades the whole universe, who is in the medicines, who is in vegetation, we salute that God.)

Indian culture treats the earth as a living system governed by certain bio-cybernetic laws. While developing the economy man has to follow these laws so that the future of the generations to come is not jeopardized. Soil conservation methods used then remain unmatched to this day. Crop rotation, intercropping, green manuring, barren manuring, ploughing, irrigation and other agricultural practices were so designed that the soil remained ever fertile. There were innumerable ponds and lakes, which captured the rainwater containing humus and minerals necessary for soil fertility. In summer the tanks were excavated and the new soil deposited was taken back to the land to enhance soil fertility. And thus the cycle continued.

Water, the Purifier

Pure and uncontaminated water commanded a very high value in Indian culture. No ceremony, from conception to death, was complete without Ganga Jal – the water from river Ganga. The story of the decent of river Ganga from heaven is an excellent allegorical presentation of the concept of hydrological cycle. As the sunrays fall on the sea, the water evaporates. The vapour is carried by the winds to the North to form clouds that rain snow on the Himalaya. The snow flows through the glaciers from which are born rivers like Ganga. But for the Ganga and its tributaries the land between the Himalaya and the Vindhyas would have not nurtured such a great variety of life.

India has the unique distinction of developing a unique system of irrigation as early as 5000 years ago, which conserved and replenished surface and ground water and improved the living environment even in deserts. Rural areas all over India, but more so in peninsular India, are dotted with small and large tanks and lakes, most of them manmade, provide excellent examples of how man can improve the environment while using the natural resources for greater productivity. But for these tanks, Deccan plateau would have been a barren land. The annecuts (shallow dams) that our forefather built across various rivers in South India and the wells they constructed to harness the surface and ground water point to the environment sensitivity of our culture.

Forest the Abode of Gods

Forest constituted an inseparable part of Indian culture. Most of our ancient book – the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Brahmanas*, the *Aranyakas, Puranas, Ramayana*, and *Mahabharat* were written by the wise men living in ashrams dotted in forests all over the country. One finds references to three types of forests:

1. *Mahavana;*
2. *Tapovana*; and
3. *Shrivana.*

Mahavana was a dense and virgin forest found in the hills, mountains and low-lying areas unsuitable for human habitation. They were devoid of human habitation. Rich in bio-diversity (both plants and animals), these forests. were the main source of medicinal herbs. Lord Shiva was the presiding deity of these forests and hence no one dared to interfere with them.

The *tapovana* was the forest where the wise men (*rishis*) build their Ashrams, which were the main centres of education. These forests were also protected, not by law but by tradition and mutual consent. It is here that the great religious and spiritual books were written. It is pertinent to note that the *tapovanas* were also marked with rich biodiversity. No one cut the trees or killed the animals, because doing so was against moral code of conduct, Dharma. Most of these forests were destroyed during the last 1000 years.

The *shrivanas* were local village forests. They were managed by the village-community. *shrivanas* had trees of local variety to meet the needs of the community. They abounded in fruit trees. They were not protected forests; felling of the trees was permitted provided that those cutting the trees compensated the loss by planting more trees. Within the *shrivana* were sacred

groves with a temple or shrine. They were also called *Panchavatis*, the groves of five trees. Each village had a sacred grove or *Panchavati*.

The *Panchavaris* had at least five species of trees. These were:

1. Banyan;
2. Peepal;
3. Ashok;
4. Bela;
5. Harad.

All these trees are known to be environment friendly. Banyan is a tree that gives shade; it is ever lasting unless felled; it attracts birds of various kinds. It is associated with fertility and longevity of life. Peepal *(ficus religiosa)* is the abode of Lord Shiva. It is said to give oxygen for 20 hours a day. It is healthful and medicinal. Ashok is a pain killer apart from being shady. Bela *(aegle marmelos) is* a medicinal tree. Almost every part of it is used to cure various diseases. The last of the five trees was harad *(myro baleen terminalia shebuala) is* well known as a medicinal plant.

All the villages had *panchavatis* but the species of trees differed from region to region. It is the local trees that predominated. The trees of the *Panchavatis* were never cut. The *shrivanas* and Sacred groves offer an excellent example of social forestry, which we are now tying to revive at the instance of the World Bank.

Indian and Western Worldviews Compared

According to Richard Saint Barbe-Baker, *"this generation may either be the last to exist in any semblance of civilized world or it will be the last to have the vision, the bearing and the greatness to say it will have nothing to do with this destruction of life; I will play no part in this devastation of land, - I am determined to live and work for peaceful construction for I am morally responsible for the world of today and the generations of tomorrow.* " Had he been aware of what Indian civilization stands for, he would have quoted from the Vedas in support of his point.

Baker was addressing to the man intoxicated by modern industrial civilization who has, *"lost his way in the jungle of chemistry and engineering and will have to retrace his steps, however, painful this may be. He would have to discover where he went wrong and make his peace with nature. In doing so, perhaps he may be able to recapture the rhythm of life and love of the simple things of life which will be an ever unfolding joy to him.*

Many others have expressed similar views from time to time but those who think that science and technology would resolve all problems including ecological and environmental are not in minority. In fact the ruling elites the world over subscribe to this view and no amount of evidence against it would induce them to change their perspectives. They would change only when the ruling paradigm has changed. They tend to flow with the current.

Thus the Indian worldview cannot stand the test of modernity, a product of 'the western worldview'. The whole structure and superstructure of the society is built on the foundation of this paradigm. A shift from this would be painful. And a society, which is in search of pleasure,

would not like to invite pain. But then, a time comes when the meaning of pleasure and pain changes. Suffering to relieve others' pain becomes a source of pleasure.

The world in which we live today is buoyant in terms of economic and technological progress. Sky is the limit. But then what would happen in the future is full of uncertainties. A series of crises loom large: ecological crisis, moral crisis, social crisis, political crisis, economic crisis, and many other crises. Who could imagine just a couple of decades back that our own deeds would take us to a watery grave if we do not stop tinkering with our environment? The economic crisis constitutes a great dilemma for us. More we progress more poor we have amongst us. What about the social crisis? We live under the shadow of the gun. None is safe. The political crisis is no less disturbing. One third of the members of the parliament of the largest democracy of the world are proclaimed criminals. The lawbreakers have become lawmakers.

While many pin their hopes in science and technology, small popular movements have sprung up all over the world to counter these trends. They have also started networking with each other to create a global movement. In India too a rethinking has begun and the urge to go to our cultural roots to recover the values that make scientific and technological development eco-sensitive and ethics-sensitive, has become apparent. Ecological destruction has invited unexpected climatic change and ethical degradation has made life so insecure that development tends to lose its meaning.

Gandhian Paradigm of Development

India was fortunate to have Gandhi under whose leadership the country fought for independence using the means, which had the sanction of Indian civilization. He taught to follow the path of truth and non-violence and be ready to sacrifice even one's life for a right cause. Gandhi's greatest contribution lay not in freeing India but in inculcating -the values that go with the concept of *Vasudhaivakutuinkam.* He taught us that science and technology must be welded into spirituality so that development is seen not just in terms of material progress but also and more importantly in terms of increasing spiritual consciousness of human beings. The roots of the ills modern civilization suffers from are deeply rooted in the minds of the people. New law and institutions to handle them attack the symptoms, not the roots. The remedy therefore lies in changing the mindset of the people. Unless it is imbued with truth and non-violence; love and affection; and the spirit of sacrifice for others, nothing substantial can be gained. Human values must guide the life and living of the people.

Gandhi's genius encompassed all religious traditions. He found among them more unity than diversity in so far as the fundamentals were concerned. The rituals might differ but the goal was the same and so was also the message. He outlined an alternative civilization, different from modern industrial civilization, which was life centred and eco-sensitive; and warned India that political freedom would have no meaning so long as man behaved like animals. Man must become truly human and his attitude towards his fellow human

beings, irrespective of the caste, creed, race or place of origin, and towards nature must be imbued with love and compassion.

"God forbid that India should ever take to industrialize after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single time island kingdom is today keeping the world in chain. If an entire nation of 300 millions took to similar economic exploitation, it will strip the world bare like locusts."

Elsewhere he said: *'Earth has enough to meet everyone's need but not everyone's greed.'* One of the dictums of Gandhi was simple living and high thinking. He wanted the seven basic needs - food, clothing, shelter, education, health, security and self-esteem - of each and every individual to be equitably met. He was against luxuries for luxuries promoted inequity and had very adverse effects on natural and social environment.

Education is the Key

The inculcation of time honoured human values in the people from early childhood is the only solution to the problems we face today. Gandhi developed the concept of new education (Nai Talim) to make children knowledgeable about the environment in which they would spend their life; to train them to acquire skills, which would help earn them livelihood; and to sensitise them to become loving instead of hating, compassionate instead of cruel, and cooperative instead of competitive human being. He advocated the concept of learning while earning.

Somehow the concept of Nai Talim otherwise known as Basic Education was never put into practice in India. The British system of education was not only retained but also allowed to supplant the other innovative systems. The Sriprakash Committee, set up by the Government of India in 1959 said:

Many ills that our world of education and our society as a whole is suffering today resulting in widespread disturbances and dislocation of life are mainly due to the gradual disappearance of the hold of basic principles of religion on the hearts of the people. ...The only cure it seems to us, is in deliberate inculcation of moral and spiritual values from the earliest years of our life.

Moral and ethical education is inclusive of ecological and environmental education.

The Commission on Education chaired by Professor D.S. Kothari (1967) was more vocal on the issue when it said:

Modernization did not mean, least of all in our national situation, a refusal to recognize the importance of or to inculcate necessary moral and spiritual values and self-discipline. While a combination of ignorance with goodness may be futile, that of knowledge with a lack of essential values may be dangerous.

The weakening of social and moral values in the younger generation is creating many social and ethical conflicts in western societies and there is already a desire among great western thinkers to balance the knowledge and skills which science and technology bring with the values and insights associated with ethics and religion at its best, viz. a search for the knowledge of self, of the meaning of life, of the relationship of man to other human beings and the ultimate reality. In the situation that is developing, it is equally

important for us to give a proper value orientation to our educational system.

India has a unique advantage with her great tradition of duty without self-involvement, un-acquisitive temperament, tolerance, and innate love of peace and reverence for all living things. Too often are these precious assets forgotten and we tend to relapse into woods of pessimism, fears and forebodings, discard and destructive criticism. A new pride and deeper faith expressed in living for the noble ideals of peace and freedom, truth and compassion are now needed.

Several other commissions, committees, seminars and conferences have since then repeated the above views but not much has been done to implement them. In 1976 the Constitution of India was amended to insert certain fundamental duties that would go with the fundamental rights guaranteed to all citizens of the country. The following five duties are relevant to ecological and environmental issues.

1. To promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the peoples of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women.
2. To value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture. To protect and improve the natural environment including living creatures.
3. To develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of enquiry and reform. And
4. To safeguard public property and to abjure violence.

The incorporation of the above duties was inspired by the Stockholm Conference on Environment wherein Shrimati Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India played a leading role.

The National Education Policy Statement, 1986 included the above points and suggested a national curriculum framework which among others included:

The history of India's freedom movement, the constitutional obligations and other contents are essential to nurture national identity. These elements will cut across subject areas, will be designed to promote values such as India's common cultural heritage, egalitarianism, democracy and secularism, equality of ***sex,*** *protection of the environment, removal of social barriers, observance of small family norms and inculcation of scientific temper.*

The Ramamurty Committee (1990) while reviewing the working of the 1986 policy said:

The hidden curriculum as distinct from the explicit ones' obtaining in the classroom situation, is much more important for the development of a balanced personality amongst the students. It is also the role of value education to bring about the integration of the hand, head and the heart to ensure that education does not alienate the students from the family, community and life. One of the key roles of education should be creation of a work culture at all stages of education so that the individual develops into a socially and economically useful human being with respect for the welfare all living beings sarva bhoota hitaya. Above all else, critical appreciation and concern for the cultural and artistic heritage of the country has

to be instilled amongst the students. It is this package of values, which will help the creation and sustenance of an enlightened human society in the country.

Echoing the above feeling, the Seventh Five Year Plan of India (1985-90) stated: *Value orientation of education should constitute a special thrust in the Seventh Plan, teacher education particularly being oriented for this purpose.* Earlier in 1981, a Seminar on Value Education held at Shimla recommended among other things that:

There should be an integrated approach in the value oriented education programme. Instead of tackling piecemeal with such areas as awareness of ecology, environmental protection community development, productivity, population stabilization, national integration and international understanding, etc. they should be handled in a comprehensive manner under the broad spectrum of social responsibility and inner development of human personality.

Each five-Year Plan of India allocates funds for environmental protection. Recently a course of environment has been introduced at the secondary level to sensitise students about the emerging problems. Crores of rupees were spent on cleaning the Ganga but Ganga is dirtier than what it was before the project was completed. The story of the environmental protection in India is a sordid story of utter failure. There are some success stories as the introduction of CNG operated public transport in Delhi to check air pollution. But we have yet to tackle the root causes. We are still dealing with the symptoms.

The issue is much broader than environmental. It is the issue of inculcation of human values in us from early childhood. Unfortunately, the educational system of the country has so far failed to respond to the ever-growing need of value education. Humanity is facing serious challenges of survival and development but the political leaders who call the shots continue to close their eyes as if by not seeing the problems, the problems would find their own solutions.

In the growing darkness, one can see some light; a hope in hopelessness. Several institutions in the country have brought value education in their curricula and have become role models for other institution. Let us therefore not be perplexed; let us follow the Upanishadic exhortation which calls upon each of us 'to get up, wake up, and learn from the wise. It is painful to walk on the righteous path as it is painful to walk on the razor's edge.' I urge each and everyone of us present here to inculcate human values in our own life; in our family; in our schools and colleges; and in our neighbourhood. Let us try to develop from below. That is what Gandhi teaches us to do.

The right path is spiritual and what is spiritual is also ecological and environment friendly. It is a difficult path but it is path that is good for all.

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