

CREATING A NEW WORLD

It is Tough, It is Possible.

● Bharat Dogra



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CREATING A NEW WORLD

It is Tough, It is Possible.

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1.

Why Basic Change Is Essential

Nothing causes more distress than the death of a child, yet every day 30,000 children in our world die of preventable diseases¹. Every year about 11 million children die of easily preventable causes¹. Over half of child deaths in developing countries are caused by undernutrition². 840 million suffer from hunger, **there is a daily death toll of 25,000 victims of hunger and poverty.**³

About 1.7 million deaths are estimated to be caused in a year by unsafe water, sanitation and hygiene related factors.² 40% of the world's people have no access to basic sanitation facilities, while 18% have no access to any form of improved water supply.²

According to Human Development Report - HDR (year 1997), "In the last 15 to 20 years more than 100 developing and transition countries have suffered disastrous failures in growth and deeper and more prolonged cuts in living standards than anything experienced in the industrial countries during the Great Depression of the 1930s."⁴

The FAO's State of Food Insecurity Report, 2002, confirmed the worsening trend in most countries stating that if progress made in China is set aside, then the number of

undernourished people in the rest of the developing world increased by more than 50 million since 1990-92.³

James T. Morris, Executive Director of World Food Programme said in late 2002, "The stark fact is that 38 million human beings (in Africa) are threatened by starvation." Warning that the scope and depth of this crisis (In Africa) is unprecedented, he said that millions of innocent men, women and children "run the very real risk of death by starvation." Such large-scale famine deaths have already been occurring in North Korea, and threaten some other countries in Asia such as Afghanistan.³

Inequalities and injustice continue to be the most important cause of this persistence (and in many cases worsening) of poverty and deprivation.

According to HDR 2002, the richest 1% of the world's people receive as much income each year as the poorest 57%. The richest 5% of the world's people have incomes 114 times those of the poorest 5%.¹

World Health Report (2002) has related the existing health risk burden to the income and wealth inequalities of the present day world - leading on the one hand to large-scale undernutrition and on the other hand to obesity among a large number of people. To quote from this report, "The contrast is shocking. At the same time that there are 170 million children in poor countries who are underweight - and over three million of these die each year as a result - there are more than one billion adults worldwide who are overweight and at least 300 million

who are clinically obese. Among these, about half a million people in North America and Western Europe die from obesity - related diseases every year.¹²

However even the 23 high-income OECD countries, who are supposed to be the biggest achievers and beneficiaries of the existing development path, have a bagful of discontents.

HDR (1996) lamented, "Although per capita incomes in the OECD countries now average \$20,000, surveys reveal growing insecurity and considerable dissatisfaction." Next year (1997) the same report said, "Rising unemployment, falling wages and cuts in social services are driving many people into poverty in industrial countries and threatening the future of millions more. the very idea of the welfare state has been called into question and is under threat."

In the USA, the UK and Australia more than 20% of the aged are income-poor. One in four children in the USA is income-poor; one in six in Australia, Canada and the UK.

In Britain a study by the New Economics Foundation which prepared an index of 'Sustainable Economic Welfare' revealed that during 1975-1990, GNP rose by about 33% but sustainable economic welfare fell by about 50 percent.

In a survey on the changes in the quality of life by the British Social Science Research Council covering a five year period, the people who were interviewed almost unanimously said that their level of consumption had gone up yet the quality

of life had gone down during the last five years. What is more, they said that they expected this trend of consumption going up and quality of life going down to continue during the next five years.⁶

This, then, is the crisis of development in the present day world - most countries experiencing a worsening of poverty while most citizens even in the richest countries report growing dissatisfaction and reduced welfare.

A recent World Health Report, warned, "We stand on the brink of a global crisis in infectious diseases. No country is safe from them." This report said, "Doctors worldwide are losing some of the most useful and affordable antibiotics against the two bacteria which are the major causes of death in children. ...Antibiotic resistance in hospitals worldwide threatens to leave medical and public health virtually helpless in the prevention and treatment of many infections."⁵

Speaking about the advent of new diseases, this report said, "During the past 20 years, at least 30 new diseases have emerged to threaten the health of hundreds of millions of people. For many of these diseases there is no treatment, cure or vaccine and the possibility of preventing or controlling them is limited. As for future, "Without doubt diseases as yet unknown - but with the potential to be the AIDS of tomorrow, lurk in the shadows."⁵

In a year there are more than 300 million cases of malaria, 90% of them in (44 countries of) Sub-Saharan Africa. Malaria kills one million people a year. Annually 60 million people are infected with tuberculosis. Tuberculosis

kills 2 million people a year. According to Human Development Report (2002), "Without much more effective control, by 2020 nearly 1 billion people will be infected and 35 million people will die from tuberculosis."¹

By the end of 2000, more than 40 million people were living with HIV, 90% were in developing countries and 75% were in Sub-Saharan Africa. Every day nearly 14000 people are infected with HIV/AIDS.¹

It is true that most countries have experienced at least some rise in life expectancy in recent decades but this has been accompanied generally by an increase in chronic health problems, physical as well as mental. The Director General of WHO said recently, "Increased longevity without quality of life is an empty prize." The state of the World Health Report 1997 (WHR) prepared by WHO went a step further when it added, "**Longer life can be a penalty as well as a prize.**" A large part of the price to be paid is in the currency of chronic disease."⁴

The main message of WHR 1997 is that the burden of chronic diseases in terms of suffering and disability is growing. A message from the Director-General of the WHO which accompanies this report says that people in poorer countries are now acquiring many of the unhealthy life styles and behaviours of the industrialized world, sedentary occupations, inadequate physical activity, junk food, tobacco, alcohol and drugs. At the same time populations in richer countries continue to live with all these risks. "Problems are aggravated by the international spread of misleading

information about consumer products." The Director - General concludes, "All these factors together will lead to a global increase in preventive ill-health from chronic diseases."⁴ In Britain, for instance, General Household Surveys in 1972 and 1988 revealed a 50% increase in 'long standing illness' and a 75% increase in acute illness during the preceding two weeks. In the same country during 1960-90 hospital admission for children suffering from asthma went up by ten times.⁶

Walter Yellowlees, a highly experienced doctor of this country said in a paper read to the Royal College of General Practitioners : "**I believe it is true to say that in those countries which have achieved unparalleled advance in technological skill in medicine and in what is called standard of living, we are witnessing the decay of man -** the decay of his teeth, his arteries, his bowels and his joints on a colossal and unprecedented scale."

While the proportion of elderly people is increasing rapidly in many countries; disability, disease and above all loneliness are denying happiness in old age to many of them. Available data shows that 41 percent of elderly women live alone in Australia and Denmark. It has been estimated that at age 60 a third of population has some kind of disability. According to HDR 1993, only 20% of the elderly people in developing countries have any form of income security. Time Magazine reported recently that even in the USA, "in possibly thousands of cases, nursing home (elderly) residents are dying from a lack of food and water and the

most basic level of hygiene."

Accidents also take a very heavy toll. Every day about 3000 people die and 30,000 people are seriously injured on the world's roads in traffic crashes.⁷

According to World Health Report (1997), workplace (occupational) accidents claim over 2,00,000 lives and cause over 120 million injuries in a single year. Estimates suggest that there are upto 160 million cases a year of occupational diseases, of which 30 to 40% may lead to chronic disease, and about 10% to permanent work disability.⁴

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the health scene in the middle of so many issues of great urgency is that profit motive continues to gravely distort the plans and programmes for better health.

In 1992 less than 10% of global spending on health research addressed 90% of the global disease burden.

Dr. N.H. Antia, famous for community health work in India, told the Times of India, **"The medical profession has converted health into illness and illness into industry." Noble - laureate Dr. Linus Pauling has said, "Everyone should know that the 'war on cancer' is largely a fraud."**

Mental health related distress is increasing at a fast pace. According to World Health Report 1997, the available data indicate that the number of suicide attempts may be 20 times higher than the number of completed suicides. Thus we reach the disturbing conclusion that while about 8,00,000 suicides take place in a year, as many as 16 million persons

attempt suicide in a year, 160 million in a decade. Suicide is among the top three causes of death in the population aged 15-34 years.

Suicide rates are known to be quite high among some of the most economically prosperous countries, raising disturbing questions. In Australia (what appears to be a land of fun and fortune), suicide rates are among the highest in the world. As many as ten percent of Australians commit some form of self harm.

Among developing countries China is supposed to have one of the most impressive records of economic growth in recent years but a recent study by the WHO, the Harvard University and the World Bank noted that China also has one of the highest suicide rates in the world - about thrice the world average. China has 21% of the world's population but 43% of the world's suicides. In the case of women, China has 55% of the world's suicides.

The World Health Organisation has estimated that by the year 2020, depression may be the single largest contributor to the burden of disease in developing countries. The same organisation says that in the present day world, there may be as many as 45 million people with schizophrenia, 340 million with mood disorders and 400 million with anxiety disorders.

According to WHO, about 120 million people are dependent on alcohol. These are an estimated 28 million drug users - one fifth of them inject drugs.

Breakdown of relationships, particularly family ties, is

generally seen as one of the most important causes of depression. 50% and above divorce rates are seen in many industrial countries.

Since 1960, the divorce rate has doubled in almost every country in Europe. In U.K. during 1955-88 the number of broken marriages increased by six times.⁶

In the traditional society women frequently suffered neglect and injustice. The horrible statistical indicators of this neglect are now quite well known. Around the world there are 100 million "missing" women who would be alive but for infanticide, injustice and neglect. (Human Development Report - HDR - 2002). Every year more than 500,000 women die as a result of pregnancy and childbirth.

In more recent times although several campaigns to remedy this neglect have been launched, in reality increasing violence, crime and social disintegration have created so much more distress for women.

In 48 population based surveys from around the world, between 10% and 69% of women reported being physically assaulted by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives. For many of these women, physical assault was not an isolated event, but part of a continuing pattern of abusive behaviour.⁸

Studies from Australia, Canada, Israel, South Africa and the U.S.A. say that 40 to 70% of female murder victims were killed by their husbands or boyfriends, frequently in the context of an ongoing abusive relationship. Sexual violence is also common, it has been found that one in five women

suffer rape or attempted rape in their lifetime.⁸

1,30,000 rapes are reported every year in the OECD countries. It is likely that only one in five rape incidents is actually reported. If the OECD statistics are used to get world estimates, then we get the shocking situation that about 37,00,000 rapes takes place in a year.

In the two decades 1970s and 1980s reported crime worldwide increased by 5% a year - 2.5 times the growth of population.

According to HDR (2002) more than 70% of survey respondents in Latin America complained of increasing poverty, crime, corruption and drug trafficking and addiction.

According to World Health Organisation's report on violence and health, in year 2000 1.6 million people lost their lives in violence including 5,00,000 in homicides.⁸ According to World Health Report (1997), in the USA an average of 65 people are killed each day and over 6000 wounded in acts of interpersonal violence. During the 1980s in this country more than 2,00,000 people died as a result of violence and 20 million more suffered nonfatal injuries. If so many deaths and injuries are caused by violence in a decade, and assuming that one such death/injury causes distress to about 10 family members/close friends, then about 200 million are likely to be distressed by internal violence in the U.S.A. in a decade. The whole population of USA is 283 million.

WHO's recent report on violence and health has quoted a 1992 study which found that the yearly cost of gunshot wounds in the USA is 126 billion US dollars, a sum much

higher than the UN estimates of the extra money needed in a year to meet basic needs of all people in the world. The 20th century was the most violent century ever seen in history, What is more, some of the worst violence has continued even during the last decade.

According to the World Report on Violence and Health⁸, prepared by the WHO, conflict related deaths increased from 1.6 million in 16th century to 6.1 million, 7 million and 19.4 million in the next three centuries. **The 20th century witnessed as many as 109.7 million conflict related deaths, or more than a million per year on average.** (Study by R.L. Siward).

If indirect impacts are also included then 191 million persons are estimated to have lost their lives (directly or indirectly) in the 25 largest instances of collective violence in the 20th century, 60% of those deaths occurring among people not engaged in fighting (R.J. Rummel's study).

In the Rwandan genocide of 1994, estimated deaths varied from 5,00,000 to 10,00,000. Little was known for certain about the number of casualties in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo between 1998 and 2001, though recent estimates have suggested that over 2.5 million people are likely to have lost their lives. The WHO estimates that about 3,10,000 people died from war and conflict related injuries in 2000.⁸

An important feature of the post World war II period is that most of the violence has taken place in third world countries, even through it was linked in many cases to

superpower rivalries. In other words, the most powerful countries, having seen the devastation that can be caused by modern warfare, were able to shift the costs of their rivalries to the poorer countries. As the Human Development Report (HDR) for the year 1991 noted. "There have been over 120 conflicts in the Third World since 1945, with 20 million deaths, more than in the second world war. In many cases - from Korea to Afghanistan - these have been cold war struggles between the superpowers carried out by proxy on Third World soil. Yet Third World concerns hardly ever figure into the Geneva talks on disarmament - or into superpower summits." The continuing toll of violence is evident from the fact that, according to United Nations data, in 1993, 42 countries in the world had 52 major conflicts and another 37 countries had political violence. Of these 79 countries 65 were in the developing world. More than half of these conflicts went back to more than a decade, taking the lives of four to six million people.

According to Human Development Report (2002), during the 20th century 'deaths by government' or 'democides' - through direct violence or gross negligence in major disasters - were estimated at 170 million. for higher than the number of deaths in wars (33 million).

HDR 2002 says that some 73 countries with 42% of the world's people still do not hold free and fair elections. 106 governments still restrict many civil and political freedoms.

In 1999 Gallup International Millennium Survey asked

more than 50,000 people in 60 countries if their country was governed by the will of the people.

- Less than a third of the respondents said yes.
- Only one in ten said that their government responded to the will of the people.

Perhaps this is the reason for stockpiling weapons of mass destruction which pose the greatest threat to the safety of this and future generations. The existing stocks of nuclear weapons by at least eight countries are enough to wipe out all human life and most other forms of life. The threat of the use of 'smaller' nuclear weapons - having huge destructive potential - has increased greatly. In addition there are the deadly, horrible biological and chemical weapons, not to mention the increasing destructive capacity of 'conventional' weapons.

The environment crisis has also reached a stage where it threatens the survival of numerous species and eventually perhaps also of humankind as well.

In a statement titled 'World Scientists' Warning to Humanity' 1575 distinguished scientists have said, "We the undersigned, senior members of world's scientific community, hereby warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the Earth and the life on it is required if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated."⁹

Further these scientists, including more than half of all

living scientists who have been awarded the Nobel Prize said,
"If not unchecked many of our current practices put at risk the future we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdom, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner we know."⁹

Today the world's supply of water per capita is only one-third of what it was in 1970. An estimated one quarter of the world's population suffers from chronic water shortages.

In a fast urbanising world - urban population is already more than half the world population for the first time in human history - two thirds of urban people suffer from air pollution levels in excess of WHO limits.

More than 250 million people living off the land are directly affected by desertification, and livelihoods of 1 billion people in more than a hundred countries are at risk.

A world-level assessment of human-induced soil degradation, which was prepared by the International Soil Reference and Information Centre in the Netherlands, concluded that 1.96 billion hectares of soils were degraded to some degree and out of this 300 million hectares have suffered strong to extreme degradation.

According to the World Resources Report WRR - (1992-93) in the last decade per capita food production declined in 69 developing countries.¹⁰

According to prominent agronomist Rene Dument.
"Much of the extraordinary increase in (farm) production

recorded between 1950 and 1984 was achieved by depleting farms."

Harvard Professor Edward O. Wilson, one of the world's leading experts on biodiversity recently summarized the current state of other forms of life in an article in Time magazine. Biologists generally agree, he says, that, "on the land at least and on a worldwide basis, species are vanishing 100 times faster than before the arrival of Homo Sapiens."

Accordingly to FAO's recent detailed studies (as reported in WRR 1994-95) tropical forest areas have been shrinking on average 15.4 million hectares per year. A recent analysis (quoted in HDR 1994) of tropical forest habitats which contain 50 to 90 percent of the world's species, concluded that at current rates of loss, up to 15% of the earth species could disappear over the next 25 years.¹⁰

According to UNEP, "Around one-third of the world's coastal regions are at high risk of degradation, particularly from land-based sources of pollution and infrastructure development. European coasts are most affected, with some 80% at risk, followed by Asia and the Pacific, with 70% of the coasts at risk."¹¹

Carbon dioxide emissions have increased from 5.3 billion tons in 1980 to 6.6 billion tons in 1998. A single country, the USA, which has less than 5% of the world's population is responsible for almost one-quarter of the world's carbon dioxide emissions.¹

Micheal D. Lemonick reported in Time magazine (Oct.

2 1995) : "A recent draft report prepared by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that unless the world takes immediate and drastic steps to reduce the emissions of heat-trapping gases, the so called greenhouse effect could drive global temperatures up as much as 4°C, by the year 2100 - an increase in heat comparable to the warming that ended the last ice-age and with perhaps equally profound effects on climate. Entire ecosystems would vanish as rainfall and temperature patterns shift. Droughts, floods and storms could become more severe. Over the next century sea levels could rise by almost a meter, mostly because of melting glaciers and the expansion of water as it warms up. These could submerge vast areas of low lying coastal land, including major river deltas, and parts of island nations. More than 100 million people would be displaced." With one meter rise in sea level partly due to global warming, Bangladesh (which produces only 0.3% of global emissions) could see its land area shrink by 17%.

The Global Environment Outlook (GEO) Report 1997 says that complex interaction between various environment problems can lead to very serious situations for which we may not be prepared. This report prepared by the United Nations Environment Program has said on a note of warning. "In the future, the continued degradation of natural resources, shortcomings in environmental responses and renewable resource constraints may increasingly lead to food insecurity and conflict situations. Changes in global biogeochemical cycles and the complex interactions between environmental problems such as climate change, ozone

depletion and acidification may have impacts that will confront local, regional and global communities with situations they are unprepared for."¹¹

This massive environment crisis, which for many, is actually a crisis of survival (certainly for the next few generations - our own children and grandchildren) has been unleashed largely by the greed and reckless consumption of a relatively small section of humanity.

Herbert Giradet, writing in a recent issue of Resurgence (Jan.-Feb. 2003), summarised the injustice on which the environment crisis is based -

- Out of tens of millions of species, one single species claims one half of nature's annual production for itself, as well as all the world's mineral resources.
- Within this species, one tenth of humanity now consumes some seventy percent of the world's resources.

Clearly basic changes in the way humanity uses and shares the resources of this earth are needed before any just solution to the environment crisis can emerge.

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2.

i. The Basics of Change

A significant number of people in the world now agree that the development path pursued so far has been harmful for them and is likely to prove even more so for future generations. The dangers of living with an arsenal of nuclear weapons capable of destroying our world many times over are all too obvious. The high rates of depletion of other species makes it clear that the existing system has been even more destructive for other forms of life.

The significant number of people who have this broad understanding of the present-day world are also most likely to be able to reach a broad understanding of the remedial steps needed to check the distortions of the existing development path.

- The existing extreme inequalities of the economic system need to be corrected. The first priority should be to ensure the basic needs of all people.
- The attitude to all other forms of life should be based on compassion and protection.
- Highest priority should be accorded to protecting the natural systems which are the basis of all life. Preventing pollution of air and water, significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions, conserving water, protecting forests, maintaining the fertility of soil - all these are essential steps in this direction.

-
- There should be a very significant reduction of military expenditure as well as elimination of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction within a definite time-frame. Only a very small share of such weapons may be retained by the United Nations only as a deterrent and to check any terrorist groups or nations who seek to clandestinely develop such nuclear weapons after their elimination has been accepted by the world.
 - A very high priority should be accorded to protecting the interests of future generations such as by protecting environment, eliminating dangerous weapons, preventing social disintegration.
 - Unnecessary and harmful consumption should be reduced as much as possible. There should be a shift from overemphasis on consumption and accumulation to other, higher forms of happiness which are achieved by helping and protecting others human beings as well as other forms of life.
 - Human value system should change in a very basic way from domination and conquest to cooperation and coexistence.
 - Conducive conditions should be created for widespread willing acceptance of better opportunities for those who have been discriminated against earlier on the basis of gender, caste, race, colour, region etc.
 - United Nations should be reformed to avoid the domination of a few nations and strengthen its ability
-

to provide peace and stability. Other international institutions devoted, to peace, tolerance, disarmament, justice, equality, meeting basic needs of all people, helping children and enriching the spiritual component of human life should be strengthened.

If a programme like this is presented before the world's people in a simple and interesting way, also supported by facts and figures, studies and surveys, then my guess would be that a big majority of the people will give an emphatic vote for its acceptance and implementation.

But sad to say, it is equally true that in the existing world such a comprehensive world programme will never be put to the vote of all the world's people as one unit. At best it can be sent to all the national governments (most of which have been violating these principles), finally it can be sent to the United Nations (which is dominated by those powers who have violated these principles on the largest scale). So the way the world is organised at present, it appears that -

- Already mistakes have been made (and are being made) which have created enormous endless suffering for human beings and other forms of life, for this generation and next generations.
- Most of the world's people want to discard this destructive system and create a new system in which all human beings and other forms of life can hope to get more protection, peace and happiness.
- But despite the progress of democracy **this strong desire of a big majority of the people is unlikely to**

be accepted by the elites who rule most countries
and dominate most of the powerful international
institutions.

**This, then, is a basic problem - how to push the
agenda of change within the existing constraints
imposed by the ruling elites.**

This is a very difficult task, but one that cannot be
avoided, as **this involves the welfare of billions of human
beings and other species, perhaps the sheer survival
of many of them. Therefore with humility and
determination we must devote our life to this task to the
best of our ability.**

- **Bring Movements closer to each other**

As one source of strength we already have dozens of
movements working generally on one important aspect
of this agenda of change - environmental movement,
women's movement, campaign for disarmament,
campaign for minority rights, animal rights movement.
Some of these movements or their branches are already
strong enough to influence policies at the national or even
world level. It is important to build on these strengths by
establishing closer linkages among these various highly
relevant movements so that people in one movement have
a better understanding of the aspirations and aims of other
movements. The essential idea is to avoid any of these
movements going into its own extremes (which tend
often to create conflicts with other relevant movements)
but instead to develop a wider understanding of how, at a

practical level, a better world can be created. On a positive side, these linkages (and the avoiding of extremes) will create many more opportunities for these movements to work together for a better world.

- **Provide a clear vision of the alternative world** that we are trying to create and what change it can bring in our lives and in the lives of our children and grandchildren. This vision should inspire people but it should be firmly rooted in a realistic appraisal of what can be achieved. This vision should be simple and truthful, easy to understand, interesting in its presentation. This should be taken to more and more people through the written word as well as the audio-visual media.
- **Provide a clear vision of the alternative life style** which is in conformity with the vision of the world we present. As far as possible, participants in the movements should lead a life-style which is very close to this life-style. Although within the constraints of the present society all aspects of the alternative life style cannot be adopted immediately but to the extent that this is possible, this should not be neglected. People who are spreading the message of relevant change should be seen to be leading a life which is in conformity with these principles of change. Only then people will accept them, otherwise they will be accused of hypocrisy.
- **Tell people how can they link up in practical ways.** If more and more people accept in principle this message of change, then don't leave them with just the principle.

We should think of hundreds of constructive and creative ways in which ordinary people within all the constraints of existing society can link up with the movement for change. There should be something to do for any newcomer no matter what are his/her abilities and constraints.



ii. Peaceful Change From Grassroots

"We the undersigned, senior members of world's scientific community, hereby warn all humanity of what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of earth and the life on it is required if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated." (Statement titled 'World Scientists' Warning to Humanity' signed by 1575 scientists)

In its 1995 report on the state of the world's children, UNICEF drew up two visions for the year 2050. In vision 1 there is increasing poverty, disease, disaster, pollution and violence, while in vision 2 there is a significant reduction of all these problems. After presenting both these visions the authors of this report said, "The choice between these futures must be made not in 50 years time but today. More than two decades when the world could have been addressing these urgent problems have already been lost. Another lost decade will probably be decisive."

Despite these and other equally grim warnings from prestigious sources both within and outside the United Nations, it is tragic that the last decade has on the whole seen clearly an aggravation rather than a reduction of the most disturbing problems facing the world. This is even more true of the last three years or so. The growing threat of terrorist attacks and their increased capacity to cause destruction, the increasingly arrogant and destructive policies of the world's biggest military power, the increasing rejection of responsibility on environmental and human rights issues by those whose role is supposed to be the most crucial, the increasingly undemocratic functioning of the world's most celebrated democracies - ***all these clear trends of the first three years of the 21st century, raise very disturbing questions about the ability of humankind to take, let alone implement, the most essential protective decisions at a time when these are needed more than ever before in human history. Instead of seeing a reduction of dominance, we see a return of the empire building and launching of wars for grabbing the resources of other nations and people which had already claimed millions of lives and caused unprecedented distress in the previous two centuries.***

There is a clear need to resist these trends, but resistance can only be along the path of peace and non-violence. It has to be the path of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, but adequately modified to accommodate the latest concerns

Violence only begets violence. An eye for an eye makes

everyone blind. This should be clearer than ever before from recent events. The destructiveness of modern weapons makes it more essential than ever before that differences are resolved peacefully, that injustice is resisted by peaceful creativity.

There are other, less obvious but no less compelling reasons for choosing the path of peace. The resistance to unjust, unequal, unsustainable systems necessarily involves a very creative and participative search for alternatives. This cannot be achieved today using guns and daggers. An armed, violent struggle will never provide suitable opportunities for such participative, independent, creative thinking. A violent movement makes it necessary, sooner or later, to stifle democratic functioning within the movement. Even if a violent resistant movement succeeds in toppling the existing unjust system, its chances of creating a new system which achieves the original aims of resistance are highly suspect. This can only be achieved by genuinely democratic and peaceful movements which involve (even if only gradually) a significantly large number of people.

Future hope lies in the creation of such a peaceful, mass-based, international movement for genuine change which challenges to its core the existing systems of dominance and injustice and creates in their place a world based on cooperation and justice.

Such efforts are already being made, the important task is to fill some important gaps, cover some important weaknesses due to which the movement for genuine change - which promises a better life to almost everyone - has not

been able to make adequate progress.

One essential task is to provide a vision of the alternative world that can inspire ordinary people all over the world to work for it. This vision should be a simple vision - easy to understand - and its various components should be mutually consistent with each other. This vision of the alternative world should be based on reducing the most common forms of distress and the root causes of this distress.

The other essential task is to provide such a vision of change to people so that ordinary people can link up their lives with this change. Some may be able to make a big contribution. While some may be able to make a small contribution. Some may be resourceful and some may be very poor . But the vision of change should be such that once people accept it, then with all their constraints and limitations, at some level they can link up with it more or less immediately. **This vision should have room for millions of creative responses from people with diverse abilities - they can then choose how best they can contribute.**

In this way millions of people working in their own creative way create a better world each time they move a step forward in this direction. All individual and group actions will be peaceful and transparent; nothing will be violent and secretive. This movement will gradually acquire the strength and people's mandate to reorganise the world on the basis of justice and cooperation.



iii. Reducing Distress and Dominance

The greatest relevance of human life consists in trying to reduce distress, pain and suffering. It needs to be clearly specified that this includes the pain and suffering of not only human beings but of all forms of life. Secondly, this includes the pain and suffering not only of this generation but of future generations as well. The present generation should strive to reduce air pollution, cut down on greenhouse gases, conserve water, abandon nuclear weapons and more generally leave for the next generation a world which is safer and healthier.

While reduction of distress is clearly the most relevant endeavour of human life, this should be interpreted more broadly to mean not just the manifestation of distress but, what is even more important, the basic causes of distress. Unless the main factors which cause endless suffering in the present day world are carefully identified, as soon as some tears are wiped out at one place many more tears will appear at other places. Even though a beginning may be made by treating just the outer manifestation of distress, this should lead towards a careful identification of causes of this distress and then trying to treat the causes of this distress.

While the causes of distress in this world are many, diverse and complex, if only one cause is to be

identified in which almost all others (other than those relating to accidental factors or natural disasters, of course) can be included then this cause relates to the wide prevalence and persistence of relations of dominance.

It has been a very widespread and enduring practice of human beings to try to dominate others, to get personal benefit at the cost of others, to try to get ahead of others, to impose their own viewpoint. This tendency may be rooted in greed (the urge to get more than others, regardless of one's needs) or in ego (the urge to impose one's own thinking and viewpoints, without giving a patient and fair hearing to the other viewpoint), but its impact is always harmful. This tendency can be seen in the relationships of individuals, groups and entire nations.

These relationships of dominance and exploitation of course destroy the dominated and exploited people. But in addition, and this should be emphasized, they also slowly but surely destroy the perpetrators of exploitation and domination. As I've written elsewhere, "The persons who fill their coffers by inflicting injustice and cruelty on others have to live with a guilt complex that can destroy their peace. To get rid of this guilt they have to lower themselves to such a level of insensitivity that deprives them of simple yet precious joys of life.

"The suppressing of spiritual values (that is required to be able to commit injustice) creates distortions in the persons (or the societies) due to which they are denied even

that happiness which many poor people can experience freely and in plenty."

These relationships of dominance can be seen at the level of persons, groups, or nations. This can also be seen in gender level relations. This relationship of dominance can be seen in the efforts of the present generations to use up most resources depriving future generation of a fair share. The relationship of exploitation can be seen in the man- nature relationship, in the efforts to subjugate and dominate nature instead of striving to live in harmony with nature. Perhaps most important of all these relationships can be seen in the tendency to dominate other living species to such an extent that many of these are in grave danger of extinction. •

It is a task of the greatest importance to understand the destructiveness inherent in relationship of dominance. Having understood the importance of this, we can then start the liberating process of getting rid of relationships of dominance and replacing these with relationship of co-existence and co-operation. This fundamental change must become the base of our educational system for a peaceful, friendly and just world.

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3.

i. Humankind's Unique Role on Earth

Among the millions of species and forms of life on earth humankind is unique in its ability to influence all other forms of life. The lion may be a much stronger creature, the whale may be much larger in size, the peacock may be much more beautiful and the monkey may be clever in its own way, but they or countless other species, for all their diversity and beauty, do not have the ability to influence in a significant way the life of their own as well as other species. This ability to influence the fate of all life forms exists only with human beings.

This unique ability also gives humankind a very special and unique role - as the protector and well-wisher of all forms of life on earth; hence the protector also of air, water, sunlight, land, forests which sustain all forms of life.

It is amazing how rarely this most basic of all questions - what is the most significant role of humankind of earth - has been deliberated by humankind. But anyone reflecting seriously on it is likely to come very near to this view that the unique, the special, the most precious and significant role of humankind is to protect all forms of life and the natural system which supports these millions of species.

Humanity is different from all other forms of life, it is endowed with very special abilities. These has to be a special purpose in this, which must be recognised and followed. The more one thinks about it, the more one is likely to be convinced that this special role is that of protecting all other forms of life. Among the millions of forms of life on Mother Earth, there had to be one capable of taking well-planned actions to protect others. Humankind is the only species that has this ability, hence its special role and responsibility as the protector of all other forms of life should be accepted.

But before humankind can do justice to this unique and enormous responsibility it has to meet the basic needs of all members of its own species. Human beings who are hungry, or shivering in winter and rain, or unprotected against disease and disasters are likely to be so completely absorbed in their own protection and preservation that they are unlikely to spare much concern and care for the protection of other species. So humankind must first meet the basic needs of all its members in order to be able to secure their involvement in the various tasks of protecting all forms of life of earth.

Fortunately it is not a very difficult task to meet the basic needs of all people. Mother nature is so kind and bountiful that, despite the substantial increase in the number of human beings, if greed and injustice are avoided, she can still provide enough to meet the basic needs of all human beings. Humankind can easily use its obvious and unquestioned abilities to utilise this bounty of nature to

provide satisfactory norms of food, clothing, shelter, skills and protection to all human beings. Hence assured of their own basic needs, people can then devote themselves mainly to the important and happy task of protecting other forms of life.

Unfortunately, however, despite all the technological progress humankind has made, it is far from meeting the basic needs of all members of its own species, let alone protecting all other species.

According to the Food and Agriculture organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, 25000 persons die every day due to hunger and poverty. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 11 million children die each year due to largely preventable causes. Over a billion people are denied minimum satisfactory norms of food, drinking water, clothing and shelter. The basic providers of life - air, water, soil and forests - have all been damaged, depleted or polluted to such an extent as to pose enormous threats to countless species of life in this and next few generations. Many diverse species of life are threatened today to a greater extent than ever before by human made factors. Activities of human beings threaten to change the climate unlike ever before, raise the bed of oceans, sink huge parts of island nations. In addition, of course, there is the threat to wipe out most forms of life if the accumulated nuclear weapons are ever used (infact even without use the threat from accidental destruction can be quite high.)

So the extremely sad and tragic situation today is that

far from fulfilling its role as the protector of all forms of life, humankind's activities have become the biggest threat to the survival of most forms of life. Perhaps the foremost challenge before the present generation of humankind is to correct this most basic of all distortions so that human beings can begin to learn to fulfil their true role on earth as the protectors of all forms of life.



ii. Principles of A Vegetarian

Millions of species of mammals, birds, insects, amphibians and aquatic life exist on earth. Among them only humankind has the ability to significantly influence the welfare of other species, that too in a planned and coordinated way. Surely human beings should use this ability to provide as much protection as possible to other forms of life. The special strength and unique position of humankind should be used as a protector, and certainly not a destroyer, of other forms of life.

However this basic protective role cannot be fulfilled if human beings persist in eating other mammals and birds (or other animal of species).

It is a matter of choice for human beings whether they will confine themselves to plant based food or else will consume animals based foods. It is also a matter of choice whether within animal foods they'll consume that food which involves the upkeep of animals (milk and milk based products) or that which involves the slaughtering of animals

(meat and meat based products).

This choice exists for all human beings. But anyone who agrees that the basic role of human beings is to protect all other species of life, should have no hesitation in making a choice that excludes those animal foods which involve the killing of animals for human food.

The first principle of a vegetarian is that human beings should have a protective relation with other animals, birds and other such species. The second principle of a vegetarian is that human beings should not eat any other animal, bird or other such species as we can't protect those whom we agree to eat and relish. The appetite of human beings, in terms of processing food wastefully into a wide range of concoctions is so immense that as long as human beings continue to eat other animals, animals will continue to face many dangers and immense cruelty. Therefore saying no to all food which involves the killing of animals is a must for all vegetarians.

In recent years there has been increasing recognition that vegetarian food is also more healthy and also contributes to world's food security. These arguments are welcome, but these are not at all necessary to build a case against killing of animals for human food. For this just **one argument is enough - human beings should have a protective relationships with other animals and for this it is essential not to eat other animals.** However food security and health arguments can be more usefully pursued in other cases where the 'killing' aspect is not so

clear - such as in the case of human consumption of eggs.

If a vegetarian is against the killing of any animals, birds etc. for her (or his) diet, then surely she should be equally concerned about not wearing anything that involves the killing of any animals. So a vegetarian also says no to any clothes which involve the killing of any animals. To extend this principle further, a vegetarian refuses to use any consumer products which involve the killing of any animals, birds etc.

In a world of vegetarians, the character of animal husbandry will change. Animals will be kept for obtaining milk, wool and other useful products they provide while living, but no animals will be kept for slaughtering or for obtaining their meat. This will change the entire relationship between them - a relationship based on meeting each other's needs, not a relationship that is destined to end in slaughter. The work of various artisans based on the skins and other body - parts of the animals who die a natural death is of course allowed.

In a world of vegetarians, hunting is altogether forbidden. However any human being certainly retains the right to self defence whenever attacked or seriously threatened by an animal. The collection of the remains of animals who die a natural death in the forest is permitted, subject to the caution that this provision is not misused.

These principles of a vegetarian life make it much easier for us to realise the protective role of human beings vis-a-vis other animal species.

However this can also create a livelihood crisis for butchers, workers of meat industry, fisher-folk, hunters, certain types of artisans. On the other hand there will be more opportunities for farmers who grow vegetables, fruits, legumes and cereals, as well as for artisans and traders processing and selling these products. By shifting more of the processing to rural artisans - where nutritious qualities can be saved - in fact an increase of livelihood opportunities can be obtained. As more people shift to vegetarian habits special efforts should be made to provide alternative livelihood opportunities to those who are displaced from their previous livelihood.

In particular traditional small-scale fisher folk need protection from any adverse impact on the livelihood caused by the spread of vegetarian habits.

There is absolutely no scope or justification for forcing any of the principles of vegetarians on anyone. It is a purely voluntary movement. So even if the movement of vegetarian thinking makes steady progress, the progress will be only gradual, providing enough time for a shift in livelihood opportunities.



4.

i. Facing Distress and Happiness

A very significant aspect of human life is how we face situations of distress and happiness, and our attitude to distress and happiness.

Distress is an inevitable aspect of human existence. The sources of potential distress are so diverse and so many that no matter how influential and resourceful a person, it is not possible for him to avoid distress. Much can be done to substantially reduce the possibilities of distress, even distress caused by accidents, but no human being has been able to avoid distress altogether.

Since distress is such an inevitable part of life, it should be an essential part of education to learn how best to face distress. Alas! It is also one of the most neglected aspects of education.

A key aspect of facing distress is not to be overwhelmed by it and to retain the ability to face distress to the best of our ability. If the inevitability of distress is well absorbed in our thinking in the course of normal life, then it becomes easier to face distress without being overwhelmed by it. We know that distress can come any time, and so when it comes, we are better prepared for it. This is easier said than done, of

course, but having an understanding of the inevitability of distress in human life can indeed play a very useful role in retaining the ground beneath our feet when suddenly faced with very difficult and distressing situations.

Although distress by definition is never welcome, it nevertheless affords **an opportunity to discover hidden abilities and to assemble all sources of strength in a way that perhaps would not be possible in normal circumstances.** Human body and mind have immense potential which at most times are underutilised (often grossly underutilised) or even misutilised. Some situations of grave distress caused by acts of injustice can motivate us to try all our hidden sources of strength as never before to resist this injustice and overcome this distress. We then emerge out of this distress situation as better human beings, more committed to resisting injustice, more confident of our ability to do so.

On the other hand another kind of serious distress, for example the distress caused by the death a very near and dear companion, can bring us closer to spiritual truths than ever before. The loss of a very dear friend and companion takes us away from all the never ending narrow pursuits of everyday life and transforms us to a situation where, rising above all narrow concerns, **the mind is prepared to devote itself entirely to the higher, generally untouched aspects of purpose of life, relevance of life, our role in this world with its inevitability of distress and death. All this can be reflected with a purity of mind not achievable**

generally in normal times. Such reflections can change our life for all time, lead us towards higher, loftier aspirations than the narrow minded pursuits of the daily grind.

Situations of distress provide an opportunity to discover our true friends. Bonds of true friendship are strengthened in times of distress.

Last but not the least, a careful evaluation of distress caused by avoidable, preventable factors can lead us to reduce the possibilities of this distress in future by taking appropriate remedial action.

There are many kinds of happiness most people experience in their life, but here we consider a classification of just three.

The first concerns sensual pleasures of various kinds - for example pleasure obtained from eating tasty and satisfying food, or pleasure obtained from sexual gratification. This also includes pleasure obtained from possessing or buying highly desirable things, pleasure obtained from earning and accumulating money.

The main principle that should guide the pursuit of sensual pleasures is our ability to place restraint on this pursuit. **We should be in control of our sensual pleasures, instead of allowing sensual pleasures to overwhelm our life.** When we retain control of our experiencing of sensual pleasures, we create space in our life for contributing to many essential tasks so crucial for imparting relevance to human life. On the other hand when

we cannot control our pursuit of sensual pleasures, we run a heavy risk of wasting (in terms of social relevance), even endangering our own life and creating unnecessary problems for our near and dear ones.

It is now well established medically that anyone who has no control over eating and eats an abundance of tasty but unhealthy foods (available all too easily in modern world) runs a heavy risk of ruining his (or her) health. Many painful and even life-threatening infections are spread by indiscriminate and unprotected sexual contacts. Adultery is a leading factor in the break-up of several families. So is addiction to liquor, drugs and/or gambling - other examples of uncontrolled pursuit of sensual pleasures. So clearly an unrestrained pursuit of sensual pleasures can be self-destructive. Such a simple message is generally not a part of educational system, while relentless irresponsible advertising pushes youth in an entirely different direction.

Unrestrained pursuit of wealth- beyond meeting one's needs and achieving some economic security against the risk of accidents - can lead to a narrowing of human mind to such an extent that it becomes incapable of experiencing other deeper forms of happiness such as those brought by the warmth of human relationships. When someone understands the language only of money, when someone lives only for money, then this person becomes so overwhelmed by greed and narrow selfish thinking that this can creep into and ruin even close personal relationships.

A person dominated by the pursuit of sensual

pleasures will like to try more and more excitement providing agents. Hence this person is likely to be driven to alcohol, tobacco, drugs and gambling all of which are addictive and harmful. Thus a person dominated by the pursuit of sensual pleasure carries in him the seeds of self-destruction which can ruin his life and cause harm also to his near and dear ones.

On the other hand a person who is able to retain control over his (her) indulgence in sensual pleasure is able to experience their obvious happiness without creating any problems for himself or others, while at the same time keeping the doors of his life open for various social concerns which are capable of providing higher forms of happiness compared to the pursuit of sensual pleasures.

There is another form of happiness which comes from achieving fame and receiving praise. The best way of responding to this is with sincere honesty, gratitude and promise of greater efforts. So many people in the world are doing good work. Most of them do not get the due recognition. We are grateful that some people have accorded recognition to our small efforts. We feel grateful to them, and assure them that we'll try to live up to their faith in us by making even greater efforts.

Last but certainly not the least, in fact the most important is the third form of happiness - **the highest form of happiness - which can be obtained by reducing the distress of others and bringing happiness to others - human beings as well as other forms of life.** This

happiness is much deeper and more satisfying than other forms of happiness - the experience is a altogether of a different kind from what a person can derive from sensual pleasure. The endeavour of all human beings should be to experience more and more of this higher form of happiness - here the happiness and responsibility of human life mingle to become one.



ii. Reducing Consumption, Increasing Happiness

In most discussions of an alternative vision of society it is generally agreed that the overwhelming importance accorded in the present day world to consumption and accumulation as the main source of satisfaction of human beings should be questioned and challenged. It is of course necessary to ensure that basic needs and a few small comforts are adequately met, it is also necessary to save for emergencies and old age (particularly in societies that do not yet provide medical insurance and old-age pensions). But beyond these obvious needs, the relevance and desirability of consuming and accumulating, or making these the main focus of human endeavour - needs to be most certainly questioned and questioned seriously.

Among the millions of species who live on earth, humankind alone has the capacity to plan in an organised

way for the protection and care of all forms of life as well as the natural systems that support these diverse forms of life. Hence it is clearly a tremendous waste of the wonderful potential of human beings to spend all or most of their efforts and energy in earning more and more dollars or euros.

This may appear simple and clear, but the fact remains that we've not been able to take this simple message to most people. The message of how one's basic needs having been adequately met, reduced emphasis on consumption and accumulation can actually lead to an increase in happiness needs to be explained more clearly to a larger audience. To explain this, moreover, we need persons who can themselves be seen and admired as living examples of this precept of "reducing consumption, increasing happiness."

Excessive consumption of many kinds - for example of the most coveted rich foods - can easily cause ill health. More generally, a life obsessed with a single minded pursuit of money and material comforts can be extremely boring pushing some to seek escape in several dangerous thrills, intoxications and misadventures.

As soon as we free ourselves from the never ending, boring and frequently destructive quest for more money and consumption, we begin to find more time and opportunity for a variety of experiences and interactions which are capable of bringing so much happiness in our everyday life. Our mind also opens up more, becomes more receptive to such experiences. Most of our experiences have to do with our relationships with our near and dear ones, but we also have

opportunities to make new friends. We also have more time for - and discover our hidden capacity for - a variety of interesting and constructive skills which by themselves and by helping to enrich our everyday interactions add so much more meaning and delight to our life. For example a rediscovery of our musical talents - long lost in early childhood experiences - can be richly rewarding in itself and also adds immensely to the quality of our interaction with our friends.

We also have more time to look at nature. And we suddenly discover the simple but great joys of watching a river flow, or closer to home, just absorbing closely the full beauty and majesty of a single flower or the amazing cuteness of a squirrel eating a nut. Or the affection of a sparrow feeding its baby. The song of a koel (nightingale), the dance of a peacock.

As we are drawn to the delightful gifts of mother nature, our protective instincts also grow. We begin to discover the happiness of protecting the forests in which birds can live happily. We learn that nothing can give greater happiness than protecting others, reducing the distress of others - whether of fellow human beings or other forms of life. This happiness, moreover, is a higher form of happiness, which no other form of happiness can equal.



5.

i. Saving The Family - The First Step For Creating A Better World

A steady decline in the quality of family life has emerged as a major social issue of concern in recent decades. Some would say the family as the basic social unit is already in a serious crisis situation in many societies.

Describing the situation in just one country, Britain, Richard Douthwaite wrote in his recent widely acclaimed book 'The Growth Illusion', "When the growth of commerce and the rise of the town caused the feudal system to break down, the extended family provided support, until it too was displaced by the nuclear family, in which husband and wife brought up their children alone and relied on the state rather than relatives for help in life's crises. In the years after 1955, however, even the nuclear family went into decline, with increasing numbers of people living alone-the proportion rose from 17 percent in 1971 to 26 percent in 1988 - and with 14 percent of children being raised by just one parent. Six times as many marriages broke up in 1988 as in 1955, and 25 percent of all children were born out of wedlock, compared with 5 percent thirty three years before."

Most of the family separations are accompanied with a

lot of bitterness. Allegations of ill conduct are made in 75% of divorce cases in Britain. The scars of broken family are carried long into future years as children from such families continue to suffer as a result of the emotional upheavals of their early life.

It is widely recognised that the type of family life and parental care that children get can have very significant impact on their adult lives. The National Survey of Health and Development in U.K. assessed children from broken homes in their twenties and thirties and found the levels of underachievement, poor education, delinquency, anger and bitterness, drinking and smoking and lack of self-confidence to be much higher among them.

In developing countries the costs of family breakdowns can be even higher due to the paucity of resources to (partially) heal some of the scars that this leaves behind. In economically poor societies, the economic breakdown caused by family disintegration is also much more serious.

If the most basic and stable of all social units continues to decline rapidly, then what hope there will be for wider mobilisation of communities for creating a better world? If wife and husband, father and son can't work together to create a happy home, what hope there is for a large number of people working together to create a harmonious world.

Happy marriages can be created only if both partners have a sincere commitment to each other's welfare, and if they are willing to withstand personal hardship or accept personal loss when it is necessary to do so for the more

urgent needs of other's welfare. There is always room for disagreement over what is more urgent, some discords can always exist, but when there is a sincere commitment to the welfare of the partner, it will be possible to resolve these conflicts. **Marriage should be approached as a lifelong relationship of love and mutual help which will enhance the happiness and creativity of both partners. This is the spirit of marriage.**

There will always be some marriages that simply can't work. Divorce in such cases is acceptable and preferably with as little conflict as possible. But the normal practice should be to approach marriage and partnership as a life long relationship of love and mutual help.

This needs sincerity, honesty, patience, a genuine ability for love as distinguished from lust - qualities which are getting rarer. So counselling to save marriages as a firefighting mechanism cannot help much, a more broad-based effort to emphasise the importance of these qualities for families will have to be made.

Parents can help by telling their own children about the importance of these and other related qualities. Family is the real base - more important than even school - for building the ethical foundation of society. None can teach the importance of honesty and truth better to a child or teenager or youth better than his/her parents. But this succeeds only when parents can set a personal example. Children have much more understanding of their parents than parents generally believe them to have. They can discover

hypocrisy and pretence quite soon. On the other hand, when parents also practice the ethics they preach, there can be no better training for the formation of honest and truthful citizens who will always contribute to the welfare of this world.

Beyond the need to strengthen and improve the nuclear family, a case can also be made to revive the joint or extended family. The institution of the joint family continues to be strong in many developing countries, although even there it is under stress.

A joint family is one in which three generations live together, and in which frequently several married brothers/sisters also live together.

The joint family is an institution in which the experience of elderly people, the energy of young people and the charm of children can be combined to provide very wholesome and fulfilling life for all family members.

The children never lack care and affection, the elderly people never lack company and nursing, the young never lack guidance and a secure base when they have to take risks and accept challenges in their work. Yet with all its advantages the joint family is in steady decline. This is partly because of some of its old weaknesses (for example the sometimes non-compromising attitude of the senior most member, particularly with regard to traditions which have outlived their utility, which is not acceptable to the younger generation). However the bigger share of the blame for the decline of the joint family probably lies not with some

enduring weaknesses of the joint family but with the increasing individualism of recent times, the escalating tendency to give exaggerated emphasis to one's own views and aspirations instead of adjusting these with the views and aspirations of others.

This is a pity, because the present-day world needs the joint family more than ever before. Due to increasing life expectancy the proportion of elder people in our society is increasing at a fast pace in most countries. Despite the creation of many care-homes for elderly people, it is now increasingly recognised that even a lot of expenditure on such homes cannot replace the care which elderly people can receive in a joint family where they are surrounded by their children and grandchildren and need not have any fear of loneliness. Such care can be ensured best in a joint family where the presence of a large number of persons makes it easier to share responsibilities of looking after elderly members.

Secondly, due to population pressure and escalating environment crisis, (not to mention the pressures when both parents have full time jobs) it increasingly makes sound sense for several couples to have only one child. However life can be very lonely for this child. This problem is taken care of easily in joint families where the single child has many cousins to play with and so doesn't feel the pinch of not having a brother or sister.

The family is be valued not just for the relationships and security it provides within itself but also for the most

basic training it provides for becoming more responsible citizens of the community and indeed of the entire world.

The basic value it teaches us - of accommodating the interests of others and of keeping the horizons of our happiness broad enough so that we can give up our self interest for the sake of satisfying the aspirations of others - can prove invaluable in fulfilling a role of responsibility in the local community and the wider world.



ii. Give Village Community A Strong Economic Base

At a time when the spectre of unemployment is haunting more and more people in the increasingly uncertain times of globalisation, Mahatma Gandhi's message of swadeshi offers a comforting alternative to community level initiatives for protecting sustainable livelihoods.

The concept of 'Swadeshi' has been wrongly interpreted by some in a narrow chauvinist way. In reality this concept provides a model for secure and sustainable livelihoods close to home not only in the Indian context but for communities anywhere in world.

Briefly and simply, 'swadeshi' means that in any community those needs which can be met by local production should be met in this way. There is no insistence or obstinacy about unrealistic, non-viable efforts

to produce those things locally which cannot be produced at the local level. At the same time, big corporations should be discouraged from producing those goods and services for which local production is viable and infact more appropriate. If they insist on intruding on this market, then the community should mobilise local opinion to ensure that the interests of local producers are not harmed. As long as big corporations (or other producers from outside the community) do not intrude in those areas which are best served by local production, there is no conflict with them.

For example, let us consider a community consisting of a cluster of say, fifty villages, and two or three small towns. Their community representatives, ensuring a good presence of women, can get together and decide which consumer goods, producer goods and services are most suitable for local production. While taking this decision, they'll keep in view the existing skills and capacities of farmers, artisans, workers etc. as well as other potential skills that can be developed keeping in view the needs of increasing local livelihood opportunities (including those skills which had flourished earlier but have been lost due to the invasion of local production by big corporations - example handloom weavers and oil millers).

A beginning can be made by playing a game which is infact so simple that primary school children can happily join in this. In this game the first step is that we make a list of all the goods and services we use from morning to night in a day. Then from this list we make a smaller list of those goods

and services which can at least theoretically be obtained at the local level. Then, finally, we prepare a third, yet smaller, list of those goods and services, which from the point of view of practical considerations also can be produced locally. The community then concentrate on ensuring that the goods and services listed in the third category are actually produced at the local level.

Apart from providing livelihood opportunities to a significant number of people, this will also ensure that the quality of goods and services will be better. For example, the quality of locally produced bakery and confectionary products is likely to be better - these will be delivered fresh and the use of harmful preservatives can be avoided. In the case of producer goods, or goods which are used to produce other goods of direct consumption, farmers may find it very useful to produce good quality local seeds instead of depending on the uncertain supply from outside sources. Similarly they may like to substitute chemical fertilisers and pesticides obtained from outside sources with locally available organic alternatives. In the case of services, a village community may decide that it will like to have its own youths as village teachers and health workers. The village community may even decide to jointly bear the medical education expenses of two or more youths in the village on the condition that after their education they'll come back to serve the village community.

Apart from ensuring quality, it'll also be useful to meet more and more basic needs (for example, upto 90% of food

needs, even after allowing the option of obtaining a few fruits, vegetables and spices from outside), from within the community so as to increase the self-reliance of the community. The community will then be in a better position to face the sudden ups and downs of the global economy, compared to another community which depends on outside suppliers for meeting most basic needs.

Thus the Gandhian, swadeshi way of protecting secure and sustainable livelihood can also ensure the supply of quality goods and services, apart from making the community more self-reliant.



What Gandhi Said

Swadeshi literally means 'my country' but Gandhi used the word in a much broader sense. Explaining this concept he wrote in 1916 : "Swadeshi is that spirit in us which restricts us to use and service of our immediate surroundings to the exclusion of the more remote. In the domain of economics I should use only things that are produced by my immediate neighbours and serve those industries by making them efficient and complete where they might be found wanting."

Interpreted in this way Swadeshi will take India to a stage where every village of India will almost be a self-supporting and self-contained unit, exchanging only such necessary commodities with other villages or towns as are not locally producable.

In 1931 he declared : "A votary of Swadeshi will carefully study his environment and try to help his neighbours wherever possible by giving preference to local manufactures even if they are of an inferior grade or dearer in price than things manufactured elsewhere. He will try to remedy their defects, but will not give them up, because of their defects and take to foreign manufactures."

Gandhi explained that the concept of Swadeshi did not involve any ill feeling towards foreigners or other related narrow feelings. He wrote in 1923 : "My definition of Swadeshi is well known. I must not serve my distant neighbour at the expense of the nearest. It is never vindictive or punitive. It is in no sense narrow, for I buy from every part of the world what is needed for my growth. I refuse to buy from anybody anything however nice or beautiful, if it interferes with my growth or injures those whom nature has made my first care. I buy useful healthy literature from every part of the world. I buy surgical instruments from England, pins and pencils from Austria, and watches from Switzerland. But I will not buy an inch of the finest cotton fabric from England or Japan, or any other part of the world, because it has injured and increasingly injures millions of inhabitants of India. I hold it to be sinful for me to refuse to buy the cloth spun and woven by the needy millions of India's paupers and to buy foreign cloth although it may be superior in quality to the Indian hand-spun."

In 1931 he warned : "But even Swadeshi like any other good things can be ridden to death if it is made a fetish, That

is a danger that must be guarded against. To reject foreign manufactures merely because they are foreign and to go on wasting national time and money to promote manufactures in one's country for which it is not suited, would be criminal folly and a negation of the Swadeshi spirit. A true votary of Swadeshi will never harbor ill-will towards the foreigner; he will not be moved by antagonism towards anybody on earth. Swadeshimism is not a cult of hatred. It is a doctrine of selfless service that has its roots in the purest ahimsa, i.e. love."

Swadeshi should be used to support not the products of local mills but that of village industry. In 1926 Gandhi said clearly : " The test of swadeshi is not the universality of the use of an article which goes under the name of Swadeshi, but the universality of participation in the production or manufacture of such an article. Thus considered mill-made cloth is Swadeshi only in a restricted sense. For in its manufacture only a very limited number of India's millions can take part. But in the manufacture of Khaddar, millions can take part."

He also emphasizes the voluntary aspect of Swadeshi : "It is believed by some that Swadeshi could be affected by an embargo on foreign imports after the attainment of Swaraj. But that Swadeshi will be no Swadeshi. It will be a virtue practised under compulsion. True Swadeshi is the invulnerable bulwark of the nation and it can only be said to be accomplished if it is practised as a national duty."



6.

i. The Real Economic Reforms Meeting Basic Needs, Providing Creative Work

Ideally any economy should try to achieve the following -

1. The basic needs of all its members should be met.
2. All the adult members should be employed creatively in jobs and activities that are fairly close to their chosen interests and skills.

It is the role of economists, managers and planners to meet these two objectives in such a way that the creative work of the people is linked to meeting their basic needs (and a few small comforts).

It is important to emphasise that this should be achieved without plundering any other economy or nation. The fulfilment of needs and a few small comforts should never be at the cost of depriving other societies from a similar aim.

This is why we emphasise that the objective is only to meet the basic needs and a few small comforts. We never say - provide as many comforts and luxuries as possible to all people. If an economy seeks to provide great comforts and luxuries to all its people, then in all probability this

will be achieved by plundering the resources of other economies or nations, depriving their people of basic needs. In addition the resources within the economy will be recklessly used so that the needs of future generations will be sacrificed by the resulting ecological ruin. This should be clearly opposed and rejected.

Therefore it is clear that the economy should strive to meet only the basic needs and small comforts of its people. We do not intend to be unnecessarily restrictive. This is why we add 'small comforts' to basic needs. So the joy of dolls and toys, birthday parties and picnics, honeymoons and bridal dresses are not ruled out in our ideal economy - our only plea being that all this should be within reasonable limits.

The market forces will be given a major role, but this will be counter balanced by strong people's movements which support environment protection and oppose the exploitation of other societies. There should be a strong movement which tells people how the interests of next generations - our own children and grandchildren - are best served by a simple life which does not impose a heavy burden on natural resources. In addition there should be strong movements to protect consumer rights and labour rights.

In rural communities and small towns, an attempt should be made to meet most of basic needs on a self-reliant basis by organic farming, artisans, cottage scale industry and local small scale industry. All the remaining goods can be purchased from the wider market. Big companies will also

play an important role in the production of those goods for which they are best suited. The public sector will play an important balancing role in the creation of infra-structure and a few important consumer goods like essential medicines. Unnecessary and bulky spread of government in non-essential economic activities will be avoided.

Both corporate and public sectors will have to adopt transparency and public accountability in their functioning. There will be strict checks and balance to prevent corruption and misuse of power, including monopolistic tendencies.

Advertising and marketing will play a relevant role of giving people useful and entertaining information about useful products. However the use of advertising and marketing practices to spread the use of frivolous and harmful products will be discouraged.



ii. Gandhi Linked Crafts to Livelihood and Basic Needs

India is one of the very few countries where the protection of crafts and artisans had become a significant component of the freedom movement. The destruction of India's cottage and small-scale industry including crafts was seen as one of the most devastating impacts of colonial rule. Instead of just criticising and lamenting this, the revival of crafts and village industries was closely linked to the strug-

gle against colonial rule.

The person who played the most important role in establishing this linkage was, of course, Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji assigned a very important role to crafts and village industries in the quest for eradicating poverty and achieving the economic well-being of Indian masses. His views on crafts are very different from export/elite demand centred craft development of present times. Gandhiji was more interested in ordinary people, poor people meeting their needs and each other's needs by using crafts and artisan skills.

Clothes being the most important industrial product needed by all people, Gandhiji made Khadi (hand-spun, hand-woven cloth) as the most important symbol while emphasising the revival of village industries and crafts.

It is interesting to recall Gandhiji's earlier experimentation with Khadi because this clearly reveals what exactly he was trying to achieve.

When Gandhi and his friends established satyagraha ashram in Sabarmati (Gujarat), it was easier for them to install handlooms, or to get their cloth woven by handloom weavers, but it proved much more difficult to get hand-spun yarn. So initially even the ashram had to remain dependent on the yarn supplied by the Indian mills. For Mahatma Gandhi it was not enough to substitute British mills by Indian mills, he wanted to end the dependence on all mills. Gandhi wrote about this phase : "We became impatient to be able to spin our own yarn. It was clear that, until we could do this ourselves, dependence on the mills would remain. We did

not feel that we could render any service to the country by continuing as agents of Indian spinning mills."

But so complete had been the uprooting of the traditional system of cloth-making that it proved very difficult to re-establish its broken links. Till only a century or two back European travellers had themselves noted how cloth was being produced in almost all villages which were self-reliant in all stages including cultivation of cotton, spinning and weaving. But all these linkages had been broken up and even the type of cotton that was now grown was more suitable for spinning in mills. The problems of reestablishing the lost linkages proved particularly difficult in Gujarat (the province where Gandhi was staying) which had a large share of the early growth of Indian mills.

Gandhi wrote, "No end of difficulties again faced us. We could get neither spinning wheel nor a spinner to teach us how to spin. The time passed on, and my impatience grew with time."

Hope finally emerged in the form of a remarkable lady Ganga Behn Majumdar, who promised to find the charkha (spinning-wheel) and hand-spinners for Gandhi.

At last, after no end of wandering in Gujarat, Ganga Behn found the spinning wheel in Vijapur in the Baroda state. Quite a number of people there had spinning wheels in their homes, but they had long since consigned them to the lofts as useless lumber. They expressed to Ganga Behn their readiness to resume spinning if someone promised to provide them with a regular supply of slivers, and to buy the

yarn spun by them.

This was good news for Gandhi, but as slivers were still obtained from mills, some dependence on mills still remained. If one could use mill-slivers, why not use mill-yarn as well? So Gandhi again approached Ganga Behn to find carders who could supply slivers. She soon found a carder and trained a few youngsters to make slivers out of the carded cotton.

With the broken links hence re-established, the Satyagraha Ashram was soon able to make khadi (or cloth which is hand spun as well as hand-woven).

When an Indian mill-owner heard of Gandhi's efforts, he called upon him to convince him that the best way of reducing dependence on imports was to establish more Indian mills.

"I am not doing exactly that", Gandhi replied "But I am engaged in the revival of spinning wheel."

"What is that", the mill-owner asked, feeling still more at sea.

After explaining his work to him, Gandhi concluded, "I swear by this form of Swadeshi, because through it **I can provide work to the semi-starved semi-employed women of India. My idea is to get these women to spin yarn, and to clothe the people of India with khadi woven out of it.**"

Here the words 'provide work to the semi-starved,' semi-employed women of India' and 'cloth the people of India' are important. What Gandhiji is saying essentially is

that the production of goods of basic needs in villages and small towns (cloth in this example) should be linked to the livelihood of ordinary people living there (in this case spinners, weavers, carders etc.) This linkage of basic needs and mass livelihood is actually even more important today in the era of globalisation related threats of mass unemployment. Gandhiji's emphasis on local crafts has to be seen in this perspective.

After trying hard to understand the causes of poverty in colonial times, Gandhiji concluded that the destruction of village crafts was one of the most basic reasons. Given the low per capita land availability in Indian villages, he was convinced that the Indian villages needed additional craft work. He wrote in 1919, "Without cottage industry the Indian peasant is doomed. He cannot maintain himself from (only) the produce of the land."

This need of livelihood should be linked to people using the produce made by local craftspersons. Only local buyers can support village craftspersons on a stable, permanent basis. Gandhiji concluded in 1934, when Khadi movement had gained a lot of experience, "Let this be borne in mind that Khadi can be permanent only if it has obtained a permanent footing as a village wear."

On the other hand, if consumers ignore social responsibility, then their society may have to bear the impact of widespread unemployment. This warning he gave quite early in his widely discussed book 'Indian Home Rule' or 'Hind Swaraj' in 1908. "It is difficult to measure the harm that

Manchester has done to us. It is due to Manchester that Indian handcraft has all but disappeared. But I make a mistake. **How can Manchester be blamed? We wore Manchester cloth and this is why Manchester wove it.**"

What exactly was objectionable about Manchester. Since Gandhi was not opposed either to imports or to machinery or even to big companies in totality, it is important to understand what exactly he was objecting to.

Answering this question Gandhiji had said, "What I object to is the craze for machinery, not machinery as such. The craze is for what they call 'labour-saving' machinery. Men go on saving labour, till thousands are without work and thrown on the open streets to die of starvation." (1924)

"I can have no consideration for machinery which is meant to enrich the few at the expense of the many or without cause to displace the useful labour of many."

When asked what kind of machinery he approved. Gandhi said in 1935, "Any machinery which does not deprive masses of men (or women) of the opportunity to labour, but which helps the individual and adds to his efficiency, and which a man can handle at will without being its slave."

The spinning wheel in Indian conditions was the best example of appropriate technology. Because, as Gandhi said in 1927 : "It uses machinery for the service of the poorest in their own cottages." Finally by taking essential industrial activity to village cottages "Khaddar is an attempt to revise

and reverse the process and establish a better relationship between the cities and the villages."

Modern industrial activity has frequently drawn criticism for its alienating and joyless working conditions. On the other hand Gandhiji was looking for industrial work which could be joyful and promote the happiness and pride of creative work.

He wrote : "All the evidence hitherto collected goes to show that spinning is an elegant art and that the process itself is extremely pleasant. No mechanical pull is enough to draw the various counts. And those who do spinning as an art know the pleasure they derive when the fingers and the eyes infallibly guide the required count."

"True art can only be expressed not through inanimate power-driven machinery designed for mass production, but only through the delicate living touch of the hands of men and women." (1929)

"The sacred touch of her hand gives life and history to Khadi which the machine-made yarn can never give. The art that is in the machine-made article appeals only to the eye; the art in Khadi appeals first to the heart and then to eye." (1934)

Again, while modern industrial activity is known to be intensely competitive Gandhiji emphasised how various members of the village community enter into arrangements of cooperation with each other to produce various products of crafts.

In 1926 he explained this cooperation at the level of a

single spinning unit : "If spinning makes one self-reliant, it also enables one to understand the necessity of interdependence almost at every step. An ordinary spinner must find a ready market for the surplus yarn. She cannot weave it. There can be no market for her yarn without the cooperation of a large number of people. At the central office is collected seed cotton for spinners. The cotton is ginned by ginners perhaps at the centre. It is distributed then among carders who redeliver it in the shape of slivers. These are now ready to be distributed among the spinners who bring their yarn from week to week and take away fresh slivers and their wages in return. The yarn thus received is given to weavers to weave and received back for sale in the shape of Khadi. This latter must now be sold to the wearers - the general public. Thus the central office has to be in constant living human touch with a very large number of people irrespective of caste, colour, or creed."

This spirit of cooperation he sought to realize most closely in a spinning centre : "the centre has no dividends to make has no exclusive care but the care of the most needy. This centre to be useful must keep itself clean in every sense of the term. The bond between it and the component parts of the vast organisation is purely spiritual or moral. A spinning centre, therefore, is a cooperative society whose members are ginners, carders, spinners, weavers and buyers - all tried together by a common bond, mutual goodwill and service."

Gandhiji's views cannot be dismissed as romantic

idealism, as the Khadi movement actually succeeded in providing livelihood opportunities to several hundred thousand people in the course of the freedom movement. After two decades of experimenting with Khadi in 1936, while evaluating the progress made by Khadi, he wrote with some satisfaction : "The progress Khadi has made in terms of the millions, though little in itself, is comparatively the largest of all the other single industries. It distributes yearly the largest amount as wages among the largest number of wage- earners in the villages with the minimum of overhead charges, and every paisa practically circulates among the people."

But he was equally conscious of the shortcomings and regretted why most handloom owners still continued to use mill yarn. On the one hand, he called for continuous technical improvement and on the other hand he urged more and more people to adopt Khadi clothes.

Although Khadi was by far the most powerful symbol of crafts for Gandhiji, he did not neglect other village industries. In 1936 he expressed deep concern that : "Flour mills are ousting the chakki, oil mills the village ghani, rice mills the village dhenki, sugar mills the village gurd-pans, etc. This displacement of village labour is impoverishing the villagers and enriching the monied men. If the process continues sufficiently long, the villages will be destroyed without any further effort."

"I may produce tons of oil from an oil mill, but I also drive thousands of oilmen out of employment."

He also emphasised the many-sided nutrition and livelihood benefits that will accrue if traditional manual technologies get a fair chance in food processing.

Gandhiji's views giving crafts a firm basis in local livelihood and basic needs provide a much more viable and sustainable path for the development of crafts in India (as compared to the development path of crafts linked to exports or elite urban demand).



7.

i. Meeting Basic Needs on Sustainable Basis

Saying Yes to Need, No to Greed

The concept of 'basic needs' is one of the most widely used concepts and yet this is also one of the most elusive concepts. Everyone seems to agree that 'basic needs for all' is a highly desirable objective, but at a practical level there are several difficulties as people have very wide ranging views on what constitutes basic needs. Finally there is the even more difficult question of what should be the aim of society once 'basic needs for all' have been realised, if and when that happens.

In a poor community, however, there is likely to be less controversy on defining basic needs. This community is likely to define 'basic needs' of a household somewhat along the following lines ;

1. Certain minimum norms of food (including clean drinking water) which are necessary to keep the body in a healthy state.
2. The least expensive housing, sanitation, furnishing and clothing that will provide adequate protection from weather extremes and is otherwise essential for protecting the family's health and

3. Access to some basic health services and school-level education.

This appears to be an eminently reasonable definition of basic needs, something which appears achievable for all people. However a large number of people do not agree with this definition of basic needs. Recently the Daily Telegraph asked a family of six having six computers, three cars, nine TVs (including one in kitchen), piped music throughout the house and almost every domestic appliance to do without these gadgets for just three days. By and large the family found it extremely difficult to cope and waited eagerly for the three days to be over. One member was so appalled by the prospects of living without all these gadgets for three days that she refused to participate in the experiment.

Many such examples can be given to show that the concept of basic needs has a very bloated and exaggerated meaning for an increasingly large number of people. Goods and services without which they cannot live (or think they cannot live) are so many that their 'needs' include what millions of people would regard as the biggest luxuries. Why does the modern man's perception of a satisfactory life include such a wide range of goods and services, a range that appears to be increasing all the time? Is this because we've lost something precious and try to fill this gap in our life by increasing acquisition of goods and gadgets? A desperate, but also futile, effort to fill a social and spiritual void with material goods?

Generally it can be said that the more the breakdown

of human relationships, the grater the dependence on purchased goods and services. In a joint family so many additional needs are met by serving each other all of which have to be paid for when the joint family breaks down. This is even more true at the wider community level. The more inward looking and isolated we become, the greater our dependence on material acquisition.

Our life has become extremely busy and we are always in a rush. We do not have enough time for human relationships. So we try to replace this by buying expensive things for our near and dear ones, without even thinking whether the replacement of genuine care by material goods is acceptable to them.

It is amazing how everyone appears to be in such a big rush, and how little actually gets done to improve life. Several of us manage to convince ourselves that our very busy work schedule is of great significance, and to support this we hasten to acquire as many goods and services as possible which we perceive as necessary for this life-style. A similar bloated view of the importance of our 'exhausting' work schedule convinces us that many entertainments are equally essential to recover from this entirely self-inflicted exhaustion.

What we avoid generally is a truly honest analysis of how useful this extremely busy work schedule is really for the creation of a better world? A very frank and honest assessment is likely to bring disturbing conclusions to most of us, and force us to reconsider our life-style.

A very strong force that leads to a bloated sense of needs is the constant advertising that bombards us from all side at all times. Advertising does have a role as far as giving relevant information to people about useful products is concerned, but **present day advertising goes much beyond this limited role and constantly makes us yearn and crave for goods we do not really need.** Advertisers take advantage of every conceivable human weakness and play on human emotions in the most reckless way to sell all sorts of products of dubious merit, or even clearly harmful products. Billions of dollars are spent every year in the advertising of liquor, cigarettes, junk food and useless or even hazardous drugs, cosmetics and pesticides.

One particularly perverse aspect of advertising is how it distorts serious problems in such a way that solutions in the form of genuine social change are replaced by commodities that can be sold.

Partly as a result of our own weaknesses and partly as a result of heavy advertising, we've been steadily commoditising our life, vainly trying to fill social and spiritual voids with material goods. Understanding this is the first step towards changing our life-style in such a way that our needs are not in contradiction with the social objectives of environmental protection and meeting the basic needs of ALL people.

Suitable changes in government policies and public utilities can also contribute considerably to reducing excessive private spending. Availability of good public

transport can reduce the need for privately owned vehicles. Community gatherings and celebrations can reduce the need for privately organised expensive entertainments.

Thus a combination of changes in personal life-style, enhanced role of community life and relevant changes in government policy can help us to modify our understanding of basic needs in tune with desirable social norms.

While the well-to-do household's perception of basic needs will still be different from a poor family's perception, it will not be too different. Inequalities will still exist but not too much. The present day society and the state of environment simply cannot afford a very bloated view of needs. It will be difficult to fulfil an exaggerated sense of needs for everyone without inflicting heavy damage on already badly mauled environment. So reaching a realistic understanding of needs is essential if we want to create a world where basic needs of ALL can be met on a sustained basis without damaging the environment too much and protecting the interests of future generations as well.

The idea that the production of material goods and services is desirable only upto a point beyond which the pursuit of this objective should be given up voluntarily may appear strange to some growth addicts but it is deeply embedded in teaching of several spiritual leaders and social reformers who have enjoyed very large followings. If we can get rid of the dominance of some narrow-minded economic thinking of relatively recent origin and give due importance to the great spiritual and social

movements of human history, then there are many sources of support for this idea. By drawing on these inherent strengths of various cultures and societies, we can build a new world which is free of greed and hence of most type of violence, where the basic needs of all people are met, where human relationships are valued, where there is genuine regard for other forms of life and for protecting natural environment for this and future generations.



ii. Two Pillars of Environment Protection

Commitment to the protection of environment demands a change of approach to life from acquisitiveness to simplicity. But to call upon the people to make this change would be meaningless unless it is accompanied by a call for another commitment - the commitment to equality in socio-economic life.

For the message of a non-acquisitive and simple life-style to have any meaning, there should first be a commitment to change the injustice and inequalities of this world - whether these are between person to person, or nation to nation. Any talk of changing the acquisitive life style without attacking the injustices and inequalities of our world is meaningless.

However, the reverse of this is also true. A society which has established economic equality to a considerable extent but is not alert to the need of spreading the message of a simple non-acquisitive life style is asking for trouble of more than one kind. It is simply not possible to provide a consumerist and acquisitive life-pattern (following the norms set by the elites of developed countries) to all people. If such are the ambitions to which people have been led, then at some place the norm of equality will break. A section of the people will be excluded from this dream world or the avaricious nation will try to exploit other countries to satisfy the greed of its own citizens. This is an even worse, an even more unjust, violation of the equality norm. If the equality norm is not broken, then the desperate nation trying to tap its natural resources too rapidly and on too large a scale will end up creating ecological havoc which in turn will wipe up whatever gains that have been obtained in the standard of living.

Very lavish and comfortable life-style can exist either for a minority in highly unequal societies or else these have to be supported by the exploitation of the natural resources and workers of other countries. It would be very unwise to promise the sky to workers while mobilizing them for fight against an unequal and unjust system. Instead the concept of a satisfactory but simple life-style should be stressed from the outset. Without this additional concept of a non-acquisitive life style, an equal society cannot be sustained. It will either not remain true to its own objectives, or build up ecological catastrophes, or collapse under the weight of its

own contradictions, as has been tragically seen in some countries in the recent past.

On the other hand, to preach for a non-acquisitive and simple life-style without attacking inequalities and injustices is sheer hypocrisy. This is empty talk and will not take us anywhere.

Equality and simplicity are two important concepts which acquire their real significance only when taken together with each other. One without the other will not take us far, but the two taken together will help greatly in building a new, a better world.

Thus equality and simplicity (self-restraint) are the two pillars on which the foundation of sustainable development can be built. To be able to achieve this, very powerful vested interests have to be confronted and overcome, and very deep rooted economic and political changes both at global level and at the local level have to take place. A well-thought out, dedicated and sustained campaign to convince more and more people that both happiness and security are best achieved by pursuing sustainable development based on equality and simplicity is the biggest need of our times. Once most people are convinced of this, even the most powerful vested interests will not be able to check change towards the path of sustainable development.

The concept of development needs to be freed from the terrible misconception of more and more accumulation and consumption. As long as production of material goods is increasing in a society to meet the basic needs of all, this

is justified and in conformity with the welfare of this society. But significant production and consumption of material goods beyond this cannot be justified and should be called 'wasteful destruction', not development.

Development should be redefined as the collective endeavour to reduce distress and suffering of all forms of life as much as possible. Some distress and suffering will always be there, but most of the distress and suffering of this world is caused by avoidable causes. **Development needs to be seen as the efforts of human beings to check these avoidable causes of distress and thereby reduce the distress of all forms of life as much as possible.**

This endeavour should take good care of the needs of future generations. We should protect the resources base so that future generations of human beings and other forms of life can meet their basic needs equally well or in an even better ways. **This is the essence of sustainable development.**



iii. Linking Environment Struggles To Livelihood Protection

Aaj Himalaya Jagega, Krur Kulhara Bhagega (The Himalayan villages will awake today, the cruel axe will be chased away).

Villagers shouting this slogan again and again in the distant Himalayan forest of Advani (Tehri Garhwal district of Uttaranchal) were suddenly interrupted by the distant roar of approaching trucks and jeeps. "The police has come," a youth shouted and everyone got ready to protect trees.

When the police and the contractor's men entered the forest, these people of Henvaighati region greeted them with even louder slogans. As the contractor ordered his men to cut trees, local villagers and chipko movement activists rushed to hug trees. Women were the most active. How could the axemen go ahead with tree cutting when one or more women were clasping the trees. After making several efforts to cut trees, the contractor and the police had to withdraw.

This action of the chipko movement in Advani forest is an outstanding example of how people's struggles to save environment and to protect their livelihood are closely linked together. In most Uttaranchal villages, forests play an important role in meeting daily needs including several types of food, fodder, fuel, leaf manure, medicines etc. while also conserving soil and water. When villagers, particularly women encouraged by chipko activists clearly saw the link between the ability to meet basic needs and the protection of forests, they were quite determined to protect forests and in fact bravely faced the police both in the forests as well as at the auction site.

This incident took place over two decades back, but the struggle is being repeated now in the year 2002 in the same

forest, as villagers and chipko activists again struggle to save trees in Advani and several other areas, this time from deforestation related to the towers and high tension wires of the upcoming Tehri dam project.

By this time the fame of the chipko movement has spread far and wide, but such is the relentless logic of market that the same government which sang praises of chipko movement at international fora is still sending its officials to cut trees (this time in much larger numbers) at one of the most celebrated sites of the chipko movement. The chipko movement may have been great, but according to authorities it cannot be allowed to stand in the way of the transmission of hydropower which will fuel the rapid spread of more industries and cities.

Rural communities leading an environment friendly lifestyle, which has much to teach the world in terms of its harmony with nature, are increasingly threatened by the spread of big industry and giant infrastructure projects, both aimed largely at meeting the insatiable demands of consumerism. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Nature has enough to meet the needs of all, but not the greed of even a few." But when the 'greed' of a few becomes the predominant objective, indeed the very definition of development according to some, then nature has to be sacrificed and along with that goes the livelihood of villagers based on local natural resources.

Many struggles for protecting the livelihood based on natural resources -farmland, forests, rivers and other

water sources - are also struggles to save environment.

This is a source of great strength for these environmental struggles.

Many struggles to save coastal ecology are also struggles to save the livelihood of fisherfolk. When Ganga Mukti Andolan highlighted pollution of river by several industries it also sought to protect the livelihood of its fisherfolk members which was increasingly threatened by river pollution.

Although some of these struggles have achieved significant local successes at a smaller level, the task becomes more difficult when the opposition is against the larger forces tied to national or international business interests. It was easier for chipko activists to chase away the local contractor, it is more difficult to resist incidental destruction of trees linked to a giant dam project. The Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) is an outstanding example of a movement which has worked with dedication for about two decades to draw attention to and resist colossal environment damage as well as loss of sustainable livelihood of thousands of families. This struggle also clearly combined the strong urge to protect the homes, fields and livelihood of people with the protection of environment. Few movements have succeeded to the extent of NBA in documenting the threats in detail and with clarity, to the extent that even the experts appointed by donor agencies had to endorse many of these objections and concerns. In fact several experts with deep understanding and wide knowledge of dams and river related issues have expressed their agreement with the stand taken by NBA on many vital

issues, yet the authorities appear to be quite determined to go ahead with the Sardar Sarovar dam project as well as other controversial dam projects on Narmada river being opposed by NBA.

The NBA helped by independent experts has also worked to outline alternatives to the projects which avoid social and environmental disruption but this work has not received the attention it deserved. Similarly at a very early stage the struggle against the Tehri dam project had come out with clear alternatives which avoided the massive displacement and acute hazards posed by this project, but this sound advice was ignored. Elsewhere in the case of Koel Karo and Suvarnarekha projects some activists who opposed these projects have been actually killed.

Despite this hostile attitude of the authorities towards these movements, they have succeeded in mobilising a lot of public opinion as well as initiating a lot of rethinking about the desirability of these projects from the perspective of sustainable and egalitarian development. It is possible that the debates initiated by these movements develop in such a way that a lot of destructive work taken up in the name of development can be stopped and replaced by alternatives which protect sustainable livelihood and environment. A lot of work remains to be done to make this a reality, and for this dedicated professionals from many diverse fields need to work closely with these struggles.

The hostility which peaceful, broad based and well organised movements like NBA have faced indicates that

struggles which try to defend sustainable livelihood from the onslaughts of big business interests will probably have to face a lot of repression in the near future. So efforts to broaden their base and enlist a wider support will be badly needed.

In urban areas among prosperous sections there is increasing support for causes such as reducing air pollution and protecting wild life. This concern is welcome, but unfortunately these issues are being presented in ways that threaten poor workers and forest dwellers with loss of livelihood. Environment protection measures which disrupt the livelihood of weaker sections cannot get wide support, but these can nevertheless be approved because of the support of powerful elite sections. **Such trends in which environmental issues are used to disrupt the livelihood of weaker sections should be resisted.** Alternative ways of taking up environmental issues which involve the weak sections instead of displacing them should be emphasised. For example, in the context of protecting wild life, instead of displacing villagers from national parks they can be closely involved in resisting poachers and smugglers, and trained as 'barefoot botanists and zoologists'. Protection of environment and protection of livelihood should be seen as closely related objectives, not as conflicting objectives.

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i. Dalit Welfare - A Broad Based Strategy

The word 'dalit' is used in India with different connotations. We use it here to mean the castes listed as scheduled castes in Indian constitution, comprising about 15 per cent of the population of India.

Historically no other group of Indian society has suffered so much injustice and discrimination as dalits. Till as long back as recorded history goes, we hear shocking instances of this discrimination and injustice. With only a few exceptions reported here and there, on the whole they had to toil for others at terms dictated by others, agree to do the work considered unclean and unhealthy by others, and accept varying levels of untouchability. They generally lived in the dirtiest part of the village or town, and had to do the dirtiest work.

The Indian constitution initiated some significant changes by prohibiting the practice of untouchability, providing government job reservations for dalits in proportion to their population and also reserving proportional seats in the parliament and state legislatures. Special welfare efforts were initiated at other levels, including efforts to spread

education and provide reservation in higher education. Helped partly by this and partly by the growing assertion of dalit unity, the dalits have progressed more during the last 55 years of post independence than in any other equivalent time in recorded history. Despite this, there is no doubt that dalits still suffer the most injustice and discrimination in Indian society.

At the political level it is generally said that in recent years the most effective mobilization of dalit strength has been done by Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). In the initial phase when the BSP formed a government in Uttar Pradesh, this brought direct benefits to dalits in rural areas as the land distribution work among them was speeded up. However more recently some dalit activists have criticized the BSP for ignoring the interests of ordinary dalits in the quest for political power which in turn is becoming increasingly personality oriented. While exploiting all the avenues of new, non-traditional employments for dalits, at the same time there is no reason why improving economic prospects based on traditional livelihood should not be explored.

Leather artisan work has been the traditional occupation of some of the most important dalit castes. The economic opportunities (including exports) associated with this work have been increasing. However within dalits a social reform movement motivated many members to give up this work because of its association with dirty and polluted work. It is

increasingly possible to improve flaying, tanning and other technologies to make the work clean, while in economic terms it remains attractive. Therefore instead of giving up work, the struggle should be for dalits to earn a satisfactory and clean livelihood based on leather work.

However the dirty work of cleaning dry latrines and carrying nightsoil should be rightly banned. Although the ban orders were introduced a long time back, due to apathy this degrading work is still being carried on by several members of traditional scavenger castes, particularly women, in several villages and smaller towns. There is also need for procuring more machines so that sewer workers don't have to enter sewers to do the cleaning manually. Several sewer workers have died when they inhaled poisonous gases emanating from sewers. There have been several movements of Safai Karamcharis or Sanitation workers but they have not been able to assert their demands as forcefully as needed. The proportion of dalits among these workers is very high, in some places almost complete. Their struggles need to be strengthened to bring more dignity and safety to this work, as also increasing their access to new economic opportunities associated with various upcoming sanitation projects.

The bamboo based artisan work is being done by members of scheduled castes as well as scheduled tribes. Several small scale local struggles have taken up the

demand for adequate supply of the raw material (bamboo) at a reasonable price to them, but still this remains a major problem for them. Faced with denial of the basic resource of their livelihood, they have to sometimes procure it illegally which in turn leads to beatings and/or bribes. Such struggle should get wider support so that bamboo based artisans (and other traditional dalit artisans) can get satisfactory livelihood.

Among the educated dalits the assertion is much stronger for protecting reservations, particularly job reservations. In 1997 an all India organisation of scheduled castes and tribes was formed to oppose some government orders which threatened the reservation policy in some important ways.

However due to dwindling government jobs the prospects for job based benefits reaching a significant section of the poorest dalits are not very high. Therefore there is need to give more attention to village based struggles of the dalits, particularly distribution of the cultivable land among the landless. In most villages a significant section of the landless and near landless people consist of dalits. So a significant improvement in the implementation of land reforms will probably achieve more for sustainable livelihood of dalits than job-reservations. This can be supported further by giving lease of quarries/small mines to cooperatives of landless dalits (both men and women) in villages and small towns. Struggles for such demands are very much within the government's own declared priorities.

The dalit literature movement has brought a new dimension to dalit assertiveness. The reality of dalits, their feelings and aspirations had never been captured with such intensity as in dalit literature. The progress of dalit literature can create more opportunities for the educated sections to work in close cooperation with the dalits in remote villages and hamlets. On the reverse side, observers have noticed a tendency on the part of new dalit 'elites' to lose contact with the ordinary dalits who still face much injustice and discrimination. Such elitist tendencies can be exposed and reduced if grassroots dalit struggles remain strong.

The practice of untouchability has declined because of the enactment of legislation, dalit assertiveness and the wider dynamics of modernisation and urbanisation. Yet this terrible tradition continues to exist in many places, sometimes openly, sometimes in less obvious ways. A broad-based movement involving not just dalits but all humanitarian sections is still needed to remove its baneful influence from Indian society. Some observers feel that even within the dalits an internal effort is needed to curb the discrimination that some dalit castes continue to practice themselves against other dalit castes.

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ii. Tribal Struggles For Land And Livelihood

About 7.5 percent of Indian population consists of Adivasis, tribal communities or those listed as scheduled tribes in India's constitution. Some Adivasi communities have not been able to get recognition as scheduled tribes. While India's constitution and other legislations seek to protect their rights in several ways, the Adivasis/tribals continue to face deprivation and exploitation at several levels, ranging from alienation of farmland to reduced forest rights.

Till some time back, most tribal farmers in Matwa village (Dahoud district of Gujarat) were so scared of being beaten and arrested by officials that while one member cultivated the land, other members stood guard near the field to warn him/her about any official's possible arrival.

Neemana says he was ill when the officials came to arrest him. They beat him with a stick and a belt. When he fell down an official sat on top of him and the beating continued. Later he had to mortgage his wife's ornaments to fight his case. Bhabhar's hut was demolished. He was beaten up badly and fined Rs. 500.

The reason why these tribal peasants suffered so much tension and terror was that they were officially regarded as

'encroachers' of forest land. Amit Bhavsar, a film maker who has interviewed dozens of such tribal peasants in various districts of Gujarat says, "The tortures which these peasants suffer can be much worse. Some peasants have told us of cruel, sadistic incidents such as chilly powder being put in the anus, a heavy stone being put on the body of a peasant and a peasant being forced to drink urine."

However it is quite likely that in many villages of Gujarat such terror and torture suffered by tribal peasants listed as forest encroachers will now come to an end. As a result of a prolonged struggle led by Disha voluntary organisation and its sister organisations like Eklavya, the government has agreed to give proper land pattas to thousands of peasants (mostly tribals but some belonging to other backward communities). As M.D. Mistry, founder director of Disha says, "We have been able to create a situation of national importance in which the government has agreed to release 124000 acres of land for distribution among nearly 68000 families. Now, process of giving land titles is underway."

However in most other parts of the country hundreds of thousands of mostly tribal peasants still continue to experience the tensions and threats that come with their identification as forest encroachers. In some places, like Chitrakut district of Uttar Pradesh, the forest officials are trying to evict them even from that land which had been officially distributed to them under the land-reform program,

claiming that this is forest department land. In Mahasamund district of Chattisgarh, about 4000 released bonded labourers, mostly tribals, have been involved for several years in a 'land satyagraha' to get titles to the land cultivated by them, but this is resisted by the administration even though only a part of this is forest land. Incidentally the Supreme Court had recommended that some land is necessary for the satisfactory rehabilitation of these released bonded labourers.

The tribal peasants involved in these struggles of 'encroached' land are among the poorest peasants who despite their poverty have to pay bribes to be able to cultivate this land. A satisfactory solution of their problems will enable them to improve their production and escape the burden of bribes and punishments. Where tree growth is considered essential, peasants can be given ownership on the condition that they will grow trees and all the minor forest produce in future years will be theirs. Till the trees mature enough to yield various types of non-timber forest produce, they can grow some grain alongside the trees and in addition they should be given some financial support under the various forestry or welfare programmes.

A sympathetic approach to resolving land disputes in favour of tribal peasants is all the more necessary keeping in view the large-scale land grab or land-alienation experienced by them over the decades. According to the

Ninth Plan document, 460 thousand cases of tribal land alienation covering 920 thousand acres have been registered. According to official statistics, of these 270 thousand cases covering 630 thousand acres have been deposited in favour of tribals, although only 470 thousand acres of the 630 thousand acres could actually be restored to them. This provides one indication of the extent of land deprivation suffered by tribals in recent decades, a major cause of discontent among them. According to persons having a good grasp of grassroots reality, alarming as the official statistics are, they actually under-report the actual land alienation and over-report the restoration of land. In several cases of land settled in favour of poor tribal peasants, for example, they are not yet able to take possession and actually cultivate the land.

This discontent is increasing further due to the much larger-scale loss of land of tribal communities to giant industrial, mining and infra-structural projects. The 29th Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Tribes (1987-89) said that about 10 to 15 out of 100 tribals in India have already been displaced by now for one reason or the other. Of course this displacement has gone much ahead since the publication of this report, but it is worth quoting from it because it remains the strongest document yet produced by the government on this major problem of tribal communities.

"The pace of change in the tribal areas has been very fast because of the rich natural resource endowment which they possess. One enterprise after another is being established, one dam after another is being constructed basically in a bid for optimal utilisation of these resources. Investment in billions of rupees is being made but no attention is being paid to the impact of these projects upon the tribal people... No one seems to have even the time to pause and think as to how many people have been rendered homeless by these establishments, the question of ensuring a respectable position for them in the new economic system remains a far cry. The biggest anomaly is the basic right of the tribal people to maintain their identity as a community and to adopt the system according to their will is nowhere in sight."

In a study of one such region, Koraput of Orissa, which has seen the emergence of several big projects to utilise 10 million tons of high grade bauxite, apart from other minerals, Prof. Vinod Vyasulu noted, "None of these large units have had any positive impact on the local people of Koraput district in the sense of strengthening and building economic linkages. They tend largely to the demands of the privileged catering to the external Indian and foreign markets."

In Rayagada district a voluntary organisation Agravamee agreed to help tribal communities (among whom this organisation had been working for years) to resist the likely

harmful impact of big bauxite companies. Since then both the villagers and the voluntary organisation have faced many sided repression.

It was hoped that the new legislation for extension of panchayat laws to scheduled areas (where a substantial section of population consists of tribals) in a modified form enacted in 1996, will help to significantly empower village communities to protect their rights but this legislation is being implemented only in a weak form by most state governments.

In a recent controversy over a controversial steel project in Bastar district (Chhattisgarh), for example, there have been widespread allegations that the resolutions passed by the village communities were ignored or even tampered with.

It appears that such struggles to protect interests of tribal communities from big onslaughts will face growing resistance. While more conventional struggles to get better forest produce are likely to evoke less resistance in some areas, in other areas covered by national parks and sanctuaries this traditional source of tribals' livelihood may also decline because of the restrictions imposed by forest and wild life officials in 'protected' areas. In fact struggles against national park and sanctuaries which restrict the right of tribals or even displace them are growing in many parts of the country.

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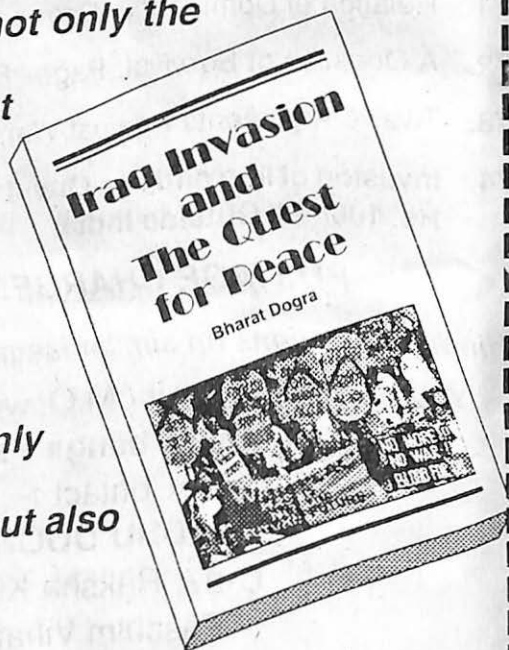
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