

The World is Changing

CULTURE OF PEACE

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The world is changing, and changing fast. Technology, education, health, eating habits, dress - there is hardly anything in life that is not changing, some changes we like, while others create fear and anxiety.

Everywhere there is a feeling of insecurity. What will happen to us tomorrow, or what will happen to our children, are questions we keep frequently asking. One thing, however, is clear. It is no more possible to live in the way we have been living so far. It seems that now the entire fabric of life will have to be changed. Life will have to be redesigned. The life of the individual, the social structure, and governance—all will have to be replanned.

One of the greatest changes that has taken place lies in the political sphere. The age of Rajas and Maharajas has gone forever. No more are the landlords too. The other great change that has taken place is that every adult man or woman, rich or poor, high-caste or low-caste, has now a vote. All adults are entitled to vote and participate equally in forming their government. Thus, politically, we are all equal.

In another field an alarming change has taken place. Small weapons of violence, with or without license, are now freely available. One can get them at one's door. One can go about with explosives in one's pocket! The age of lathis has gone; the age of bombs has come. That may be one reason why people are becoming more and more violence-minded. Look at our elections. They look like battles. Political parties have become caste—organizations mutually fighting for power. Our society is a cobweb of castes. One result of adult franchise is that it creates fear in the minds of those, who have enjoyed monopoly of power until now. Those, who ruled and those, who were ruled both have realized that the world is changing. Democracy has come, but there is one thing that we have yet to learn. Why should neighbors not sit together, solve their common problems and resolve their petty conflicts without going to the courts of law? The pity is that there is no dearth of leaders, but they do not come and tell us these simple things. They come to us; they ask for our votes in the name of caste, religion, or our group interests. But they never explain to us the things that matter seriously in life.

Change is pervasive. There is no end to it. Man has already reached the moon. He may soon reach other planets. Who knows, a day may soon come, when a new earth may be found—a new flourishing civilization. Who knows what wonders are in store for us!

Whatever the faults and failings of our civilization, man in his onward journey spread over a vast number of centuries, has achieved a great deal. Our ancient Rishis discovered that there is basic unity in creation. Life is one. It is whole. This basic law became the basis of all the spiritual thoughts that developed later. It is an eternal law. It holds good

even today. Without it we cannot think of any new phase of civilization. There is a cosmic power that moves everything, and everything, big or small, is an expression of that cosmic power.

As against those that delved into the realm of the spirit, there were the scientists, who discovered the mysteries of nature. The scientists and the technologists made tools, devised machines that made life livable.

The present-day civilization stands on two legs. One is spirituality, and the other is science. The two together have made civilization what it is. The two must come together in a planned manner, to create a better and happier life.

Imagine how man's mind has developed. On the one hand man went on discovering new ways and values, and on the other he continued to fight. Endless wars have taken place throughout history. War and violence have been man's never-ending story of life. The western world, in spite of all the scientific achievements, goes on waging wars. It fights one war, and prepares for the next war. There are quite a large number of people in the west who consider that peace merely means an interval between two wars.

Let us clearly understand that peace is not an interval between two wars. On the other hand peace is a way of life. It is a whole culture of life; it includes the social fabric and governance both. It is nothing less than that. If once we accept that peace is merely the period between two wars, we shall have to concede that man is a fighting animal. He loves fighting. He cannot live without it. Therefore he cannot live without an enemy. If there is no enemy, he will fight with his neighbor. Fight he must. The strange thing is that while man craves for peace, he loves to fight. We worship divine incarnations, but we present them as fighters. By placing the weapons of war in their hands, we made God in our own image. To us divine power must express itself in the form of power, the power to fight, and the power to kill and conquer. Hindus regard Rama and Krishna as incarnations of God, but we placed bow and arrow in the hands of Rama, and 'Sudarshan Chakra' in the hands of Krishna. Both these are weapons of war. Does this mean that we want even God to fight?

Karl Marx was the first man to say that all civilizations developed by man so far have been rooted in violence. How true! When Marx's opinion was presented to Gandhi and he was asked, "Do you agree?" He replied, "Yes, but add two words more- including Indian." We Indians are always proud of our civilization being spiritual. But we also placed weapons of war in the hands of our 'Gods.'

Men the entire world over, are anxious that wars should now end forever. Not only wars, he wants all violence to stop- not for once but for all time to come. If this change comes about, it will be the profoundest change that humanity has ever seen. But if this goal has to be achieved we shall have to change much that we have valued so far. We can never hope that our ways of living should remain as they are, and only war and violence should end. Change, if at all, has to be total, comprehensive. And it has to be continuing.

A change in the fundamentals of living has to be universal. If we continue to need war, there is nothing that can stop it. If war is necessary, violence will continue. Why should we need wars? Why should one man exploit the other? All talk of war and exploitation is now out dated; violence is anti-life itself.

Is spirituality now a spent force? Has science become bankrupt? Are they unable to solve this crisis in the human civilization? Either we abolish war or we perish. Violence or life, the choice is clear. Humanity has reached a point where the choice before it is clear; it is between violence and existence.

Freedom from violence does not only mean freedom from war. It is fundamental; but there are other things equally necessary. We need to plan our lives in a better way. Even the apparatus of the state should be so planned that it becomes less and less coercive. In all the three spheres, the life of the individual, the arrangement of group-life in society and its governance, the process of diminishing violence should go on continuously. If this happens, we shall begin to feel that our civilization is changing. For a new civilization we need both science and spirituality a happy blending of the two.

Along with the rest of the world, India too is changing. But some of these changes create fear. People wanted a peaceful life after the British had left, but they are not getting it. The average person has a better life because there are more physical conveniences now. A more comfortable life is not necessarily a happier life. A happy life needs peace and security first of all. Both are somehow missing. Pervasive insecurity is a dangerous thing. It leads to the demand for a strong government, which may lead to an authoritarian government. Do we think that a popular demand of this kind will be a blessing? It will be a sad day indeed if we have to barter away our freedom and democracy for the sake of more comforts. But that possibility cannot be ruled out. It is time we sought an alternative and showed people better ways of living, happier lives, happier and more secure lives. Our constitution is based on democracy. People want bread but they also want "Izzat" (Self- respect). One cannot be denied for the sake of the other. In this age of planning, there is no reason why some people should continue to be victims of ignorance or social-injustice. Cannot good planning do this? Cannot we guarantee basic amenities for all? Our spiritual tradition tells us that all creatures—not men alone—have the right to live and prosper. Democracy does not mean only election. Man wants opportunity to grow and attain new heights. He wants a higher life, a better harmonious life.

So, the first necessary change should be in the field of democracy. The whole pattern of democracy has to change. Our country lives in its villages and cities; therefore, our democracy has to reach the people in their villages and cities. But this can be possible only if representative democracy is replaced by participatory democracy in which people will be called upon not only to vote for others but to become active citizens, being called upon to shoulder responsibilities—live together and learn together, and together to create a better life for all. It means that there should be fewer laws and less dependence on government. A better society has to mean less and less government. We have already introduced a scheme of Panchayatiraj, then why not handover Panchayats to their Gramsabhas and let them function freely?

The fact is that our villages are not integrated communities: They do not even co-operate among themselves. There is no life-sharing. Therefore, the first thing necessary is to try to convert these groups of houses into communities, in which families are free to live their own lives but they have to realize that there is much that is common among them, what is common has to be shared. Sharing has to be planned and accepted willingly. This is where development has actually to begin.

Democracy has created a universal desire for a free and better life. But the reality is that democracy as practiced by us does not lead to the fulfillment of our desire. It rather leads us in the opposite direction. We know that although the present age is one of democracy, yet, there are countries, big and small, developed and less developed, in which democracy has yielded place to authoritarian rule. It is known a fact that because of adult franchise millions of people have become builders of power. Power is no more a monopoly of a few. This is a great thing that has happened for the first time in human civilization. But when we see that for the smallest things we have to run to the market and for the pettiest quarrels or conflicts we have to run to the courts for settlement, the question naturally arises in our minds whether our democracy is leading us to self-rule or it is taking us in the opposite direction. Is it that in 1947 power was not transferred to the people, but to a new set of rulers though Indian? Swaraj is much more than rule by others, whoever they might be. Swaraj really means self-rule. If we want Swaraj, we have to rule ourselves.

We find that machines are becoming smaller and smaller day-by-day. Electricity has reached villages, if not yet our homes. Then how is it that industries have not come with small machines and electricity? What has actually happened is that industries already existing in our villages have disappeared. Where have they gone? To distant countries? Or, they disappeared all together? Looking at things from the angle of law and order or peaceful neighborly living, we have begun to look to the government for the pettiest things. We have an all-powerful bureaucracy. We seek its interference and it is ever ready to interfere. Shall we call this 'Swaraj'?

There is only one way out of this total crisis – participatory democracy and Mahila Shanti Sena. We must prepare to redesign our lives, to redesign our social order and rebuild our governance. Let us remember what Gandhi said: That government is the best that governs the least. Each village community has to become a unit of 'Swaraj'. That is, it should be able to plan its total life in terms of its economy, education, health and other things pertaining to local life. The village community needs an army of peace-workers, who will not fight among themselves but willing to solve problems and resolve conflicts and disputes peacefully. In this task of neighborhood-building, women are likely to do better than men. That is the rationale of Mahila Shanti Sena. The police or the court should be approached only when a serious crime is committed, not otherwise. In cases of petty disputes, neighbors should sit together and decide, and not make it a matter of prolonged litigation in a court of law. Lord Buddha gave us a principle of harmonious group living. He said: 'meet, talk and agree'. Go on talking till an area of agreement emerges. This is the key principle of a happy and harmonious neighborly living. In a participatory democracy a decision by majority is out of place; all decisions should be by a consensus.

There is no room for a permanent majority and permanent minorities. Decision by majority is one of the most potent reasons why our democracy has turned into perpetual caste-war. Experience so far has proved beyond doubt that a democracy cut up into political parties is bound to lead to endless caste-rivalry in a country like India with its divisions of castes, religions etc.

It is unfortunate that our democracy has come to be confined to capitals, towns and cities. It goes to the villages only once in five years, when leaders have to seek peoples' votes. This country enjoys the pride of being the world's first republic in Vaishali and also giving rise to India's first empire - the Magadh Empire. If we want an alternative, it is there in our tradition. Gandhi in his legacy left for us a complete blue print of redesigned local, national and global life. Alternatives we already have. What we need is the will to make use of them. Through our long tradition built over centuries by ancient 'Acharyas and Rishis' what we need is to integrate them with modern science and technology.

In short, what we need is a change in the life of the individual, in the structure of society and in governance. This three-fold change will lead us to more changes and in course of time, we will have total change. It will be a process of moral evolution.

The point at which humanity has reached in its march forward in civilization, it must stop to think how it proceeds further. Obviously, what it needs is a total culture of peace. Gandhi foresaw this crisis in human civilization. It is this realization that inspired the philosophy of constructive work. This philosophy really means a new total creative revolution. This was made clear by Jaiprakash Narayan in 'Total Revolution'. Gandhi and Marx both came to the same conclusion namely that the ending of state as a coercive force is essential for the liberation of man. While Marx stood for the complete withering away of the state, Gandhi wanted state to act as a co-coordinating force. It is obvious, according to both revolutionaries that we should plan a strategy that is calculated to bring about a slow but progressive withering away of the state as a coercive power. That will be the real goal of the new creative revolution.

In the world today, there are about 200 countries, which have adopted democracy as a mode of governance. But whatever the form of democracy as it is practised in the world today, democracy is a halfway house. Democracy and peace have to go together. Without peace democracy has little meaning and without democracy peace has no practical form. It is democracy that makes peace a force. Both together will take humanity several steps forward in civilization. But we should remember that peace is not just an interlude between two wars. It means a total culture of peace, nothing less.

Peace as a force of civilization has to be both creative and constructive. The question is: who will be the vanguard of humanity's evolution in the process of civilization? Nature has made woman the most creative force. Can we not use her creative talents to make society more human and enlightened? Woman created the family and men created the state and government. Obviously, of the two, woman is more creative. Local life is comprised of families. The family is the starting point of the culture of peace. The circle around the family should include the group of families in the neighborhood and thus the

circles will go on till a day may come – may be few centuries hence to come when they will include the world and go even beyond the world to include the entire creation. After all man has reached the moon. Does it not show that he has already entered the inter-planetary phase of civilization? This explains why the first step that Mahila Shanti Sena has planned to take is that of neighborhood building. By building the neighborhood we lay the foundation of our dreams.

The first step will naturally lead to succeeding steps. If this succeeds it will be possible to introduce participatory democracy at the roots. And, for sometime it may be possible for both representative and participatory democracy to exist together. But then the basic constituency will be the Panchayat, not the party, a group or an individual. There will be no room left for organizations based on castes. The Panchayat is bound to be a mixed constituency.

Nation should be organized in local units. These units will go up in an ascending order to district, region, state and nation etc. The market will shrink in the sense that trade will be confined to surpluses. The market is a dominating force today. It will cease to exist as such. The market will be there because society needs it, not because market needs customers. Why should there be wars then? This will in course of time lead to a wholesale change in the life of the individual, in the structure of society and in the form of government. It will be organized around neighborhood that will have their own economy, polity, education, and even religion. Humanity will thus have a new culture. This culture will not be parasitical. It will be a productive culture. India's culture in spite of its emphasis on spirituality gave birth to a kind of feudalism, which degraded the woman and enslaved the laborer.

The new change, which looks very much like a dream today will have enough room for everybody to grow, to his/her full height. May be, this will happen in the moral stage of civilization that will come after the democratic stage. For that a great deal of transition planning will be necessary. But let us take the first step in the right direction.

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