

Future At Stake

The last century witnessed many far reaching and profound changes in human civilization. Some of them are – huge population explosion, immense wealth creation, spread of political freedom and democracy, great advancement in science and technology, and so on. The political, military, technological, and economic prowess of nations, mainly in the West and in Japan, grew in strength and complexity in such proportions as were quite unimaginable a century ago. But all such changes have been more uneven across the world than ever before, vastly widening the gulf of difference between the few million rich and privileged and the billions of poor and underprivileged.

A few decades back, the whole process of change took enormous proportions with a world-winning strategy: liberalization and globalization. It was not new, but now it came from the West with a vengeance to cover the whole world. This model of development has brought about immense growth rate in world economy and trade (that includes arms and drugs among the foremost items). It has preached the Utopia of a global village with a knowledge-based society. It has created jobs for many, while the number of the unemployed kept on rising. Between 2001 and 2005, according to a UN report, 86,922 Indian farmers committed suicide. This is something unprecedented in our long history. Food crisis has worsened recently. Experts fear social unrest and political turmoil in poor countries. Already there have been food riots in some of them. But ‘development’ cannot stop: for its inexhaustible fuel is the greed of the wealthy and powerful.

The natural environment of the world has started to succumb to its exploiting power. Scientists say that our species faced the danger of extinction due to climate change some seventy thousand years ago, when the total number of human beings dwindled to a mere 2,000. Today we face another such scenario. The largest ice shelf in the arctic region has cracked into three pieces due to the greenhouse effect. The pace of this devastating change of earth’s climate is in the accelerating mode. Vast masses of land may go under the seas in a few centuries. Many unpredictable changes will follow the rise in temperature and sea level. This time the devastation is man-made. The cause was known for quite some time and could be tackled – the present development paradigm: more industries, more cars, and more air conditioners, and so on and so forth for some people (while the destructive outcomes are for all). But we are not mindful to change our ways to save the future of mankind. The great powers of the world are still dithering to take adequate action. The reason is simple – greed. We are mad for power and lucre, and there is a method in this madness – liberalization and globalization – the flat prescription for all nations!

Of even greater significance for human civilization is: the inner man, the mind of man, has also come under its sway. What we are now catering through electronic and print media can hardly qualify as culture. Barring some exceptions, it is utterly destructive. It kills the inner man slowly and surely, without any palpable pain, like the mythical poison – hemlock. And its pervasiveness makes it all the more dangerous for the future of humanity. In this age of communication and convergence, this poison is spreading everywhere in the guise of ambrosia, faster than lightening, and entering every home, into every mind, even in the formative period of life. By its influence the youths of every nation are learning to shun noble idealism and becoming more and more prone to pleasure-seeking. Buds of life that were to blossom into bright morning flowers with divine colour and fragrance are smashed

into ugly trash! Only a few can see its implications for the future. So, hardly any voice of dissent is heard.

This all round destruction of the external as well as internal world of mankind is going on in the name of development. At the basis of this mad rush is rank materialism, which considers man, the potentially divine being, almost as a self-seeking beast. Unless the winning spree of this outlook and its resultant forces is checked and curtailed and the whole trend reversed, the inner world of man will soon be laid waste. Swami Vivekananda cautioned us long back about this: 'For in the West the old order of things is vanishing, giving way to a new order of things, which is the worship of gold, the worship of Mammon.... No nation, however strong, can stand on such foundations, and the history of the world tells us that all that had such foundations are dead and gone. In the first place we have to stop the incoming of such a wave in India.' (*Complete Works, Vol. III, p. 433*)

We have failed to stop the wave before it engulfed the nation. The new generations are brought up in this new environment of glittering shopping malls in the midst of filth and poverty. Education has not provided them with any avenue to learn serious thinking even. Should we not make a firm resolve to change this state of things? What can we do to build a better future? Shall we all work to build a 'knowledge-based society'? Here comes the answer from Swami Vivekananda: 'It is culture that withstands shocks, not a simple mass of knowledge. You can put a mass of knowledge into the world, but that will not do it much good. *There must come culture into the blood.*' (*Complete Works, Vol. III, p. 291*)

Culture stands for refinement of mind. And here lies the clue to a plan of action that goes to the root of the crisis facing humanity and treats it adequately.