

Religion & Society

Reflections Of A Visionary: Modern World

(Excerpts from 'The Burden Of The Past' by Shri K. C. Lalwani, published by Minerva Associates, Calcutta, 1974, pages 22-24.)

Prof. Lalwani, an eminent scholar of Jainism, wrote these essays in late nineteen-fifties. He observes that unbridled expansion of technology has created a spiritual vacuum in individuals, which, in turn, has led to numerous physical and mental problems. Further, excessive industrial undertakings have resulted in serious environmental problems. Obviously, minimizing production and consumption is necessary to solve the problems of pollution and global warming. In his celebrated book 'The Present Crisis Of Faith', Dr. Radhakrishnan writes,

"It is a truism to say that mankind is today in the midst of one of the greatest crises in history ... due to the lack of adjustment of the human spirit to the startling developments in science and technology. ... Science has relieved us of grinding poverty, mitigated the tortures of physical pain. Yet we suffer from an inward loneliness. All growth is marked by pain. ... The transition that we have to effect today, if we are to survive, is a moral and spiritual revolution which should embrace the whole world."

Evidently, the proper course of action is to secure a balanced development by following the Jain teaching of non-possessiveness. - DCJ

War

War is one of the oldest human institutions in the world. It has acquired a new significance in this industrial age. Hence those who have sought to belittle a modern war on the ground of its being the outcome of national psychologies have failed to detect its family link with technology, and have remained obsessed by the psychological tension which is only an outcome rather than a progenitor of the conflict. In the period after the second great war, people talked of disarmament, of co-existence, of PANCH SHEEL, of a ban on nuclear weapons; politicians released white doves of peace; and scientists made a display of their intellectual power in the vacuum, - all trying to impress that they were able to ban war for good. But they do not know that since they have not benefited from learning through suffering, they have created problems for which war alone is the most infallible remedy. They may defer it because of psychology of fear; but they cannot altogether get rid of it, and when they find that they cannot otherwise solve their problems, they will hail it.

Materialism

Surplus is a material problem, but it is a basic problem too; and hence when the economist talks about scarcity, limitation of resources, and the

like, it is surplus that wrecks the world. The basic problem for humanity as a whole today is not so much a scarcity of output which may go round for everybody, but an excessive growth of the scientific and industrial power of the world that can never be harnessed to a welfare end.

Already this new power of science and industry has started polluting the environment making the world unhealthy for human habitation. The ever-growing surplus of industrial and scientific power has created a worldwide scarcity of fuels and basic minerals. In this manner, as the human society is engrossed in a material problem of its own creation, it has appropriately forfeited a right to invoke a spiritual solution.

The problem is simple but it is invisible, the remedy provided by war is effective but it is crude, haphazard and temporary. When England was the only workshop of the world, the world was going on fairly well; with half a dozen more workshops in operation, the world is in the grip of stagnation; and when another dozen or so workshops are added to those existing, the human society will find itself in a grave of its own digging. Too much of industrialism will invite its own doom. In helping the industrialization of the world, the West rejoices in its own capacity to avert a secular stagnation, but in reality, it is creating a situation in which the whole humanity may end in a violent catastrophe. For, with a steady growth in the number of workshops, if each workshop is not willing and able to restrain itself to what is legitimate, the need for the liquidation of the surplus will go up in future, and with this will go up the possibility, frequency and intensity of global wars. The world is united today not on the basis of a genuine desire for coexistence, but on a very superficial plane in which the future of mankind rests on the fingertips of a handful of politicians who, 'by pressing a button, can detonate an atom bomb'.

Problems of industrial age

Spiritual life brings man nearer to salvation by wiping out his problems, but material life adds fresh problems everyday.

Thus when man feels that he has provided an effective solution to one problem, he has really created many. Such has been his experience with the industrial age. For instance, in the nineteenth century, sweating of labor was a great problem, but now that it has been checked through factory legislation, there has cropped up the problem of leisure. Experience with the Hellenic society has been that the relaxation of tension brought about a deterioration of human quality. The fact is that most men, primitive or modern, are suitable for tension, may be in a

factory or in a battle field, but they are hardly so for leisure and creativity. *In the prevailing atmosphere, there is no automatic diversion of human energy from politics, sex and money making to spiritualism. In human life, there is no such automatic diversion of energy from a point where it is superfluous to another where it may be gainfully employed. Rather, the process has been that with a gradual change in man's interest from the spirit to the flesh, the spiritual element has receded into the background, and the vacuum so created has been occupied by activities, which, howsoever impressive in their external appearance, cannot save him from the clutches of destiny.*

Spiritual vacuum

The problems created by technology are many, and each one is sufficiently powerful to wreck a whole society. The material comfort that technology has created for man is a poor compensation for the spiritual vacuum it has left unbridged, and yet the craze for industrialization continues, and it is too powerful to resist. Machinery represents sin, opined Gandhi, and yet free India is mad after industrialization. If technology is triumphant everywhere, it is because it is beyond the power of man to resist its growth. No matter whether it releases human energy to rot, technology is spreading fast, and even though the western man is caught up in his own stagnation, he sees in the expansion of technology a chance of unification of the modern world, which, in his view, is his own creation. Toynbee has administered a gentle rebuke at technology for having 'left the human nature unchanged', but the blame is wrongly laid, as if technology is at the root of everything, and man knows nothing. In human society, as distinguished from the kingdom of nature, cause and effect are not independent items. The same item, which is cause in certain respects, is effect in others. *If industrialism appears to be the cause of war, it is itself the outcome of a change in man's gaze from the inward to the outward in which science has been harnessed to the exploitation of environment. Whether consciously or unconsciously, science today is given a destructive role; and when its high priest, the scientist, rejoices in his own achievements, the real power behind him, the politician, plans their use for the next Armageddon.*