

Observations & Views:

Generation Gap: An Aspect Of Mental Violence

Generation gap is the term used to describe the differences between people of a younger generation and their elders, occurring when older and younger people do not understand each other because of their different experiences, opinions, habits and behavior. Some individuals spent their formative years in India. Their ideas and attitudes are different from the views and traditions prevalent in the West. Adults as well as youngsters should bear this in mind in interacting with each other.

The article 'Color Of Aging', published in 'Rise Up' of July 11-17, 2008, brings out two important concepts regarding generation gap:

1. Honor the elders by respecting their traditions
2. Understand that the cultural traditions of the elderly can enhance their quality of life

One can make similar statements on behalf of the younger generation as well. Realizing that they were young at one time, parents should try to look at the intentions and actions of their children from the point of view of the youngsters as well. Understanding each others' motives would help. The youngsters should understand that some day they too will become old and will have to face their own children. We should examine a given situation from each other's viewpoint. This will avoid considerable verbal and mental violence.

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Multiplicity Of Viewpoints - A Resource To Bridge The Generation Gap¹

by Dr. Sagar Mal Jain

The concept of multiplicity of viewpoints can be applied to resolve conflicts and establish peace and harmony between families and among family members. In general, the conflicts in families revolve around father and son, and mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. In both cases, the squabble has its roots in discordant points of view. The father wishes to shape his son's life in the manner of his own life - following similar attitudes and culture traits; while the son demands logical basis for what he is asked to follow. One is engrossed in traditional culture; the other intends to cross the boundaries. Similar situation exists in the case of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The mother-in-law desires that the course of her

¹ English adaptation of an excerpt from 'Multi-dimensional Application of ANEKAANTAVAAD', published by PARSHVANATH VIDYAPEETH, Varanasi, 1999, page xlvii.

daughter-in-law's life should be similar to her earlier life when she had joined the family. The daughter-in-law desires to mold her life according to the present environment and current circumstances, sometimes following the culture traits of her parents' family. Further, she wants to enjoy the same freedom that she had prior to her marriage. Her husband's family, on the other hand, expects her to follow their ideas. These perceptions lead to arguments. Under such circumstances, if the individuals involved are not tolerant and they do not appreciate others' viewpoints, the conflicts are not resolved. The concept of multiplicity of viewpoints helps resolve the difference in perceptions.

In actual practice, while forming any concept about any individual and making any decision about any situation, we should place ourselves in the shoes of the other person. We can understand all different aspects of a given situation by looking at it from other's viewpoint as well. The father should also adopt the viewpoint of his son, the mother-in-law the viewpoint of the daughter-in-law, and the officer should consider the position and viewpoint of his subordinate. Thus adopting the concept of multiplicity of viewpoints may bring about harmony in interpersonal relationships.

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Use Of Tobacco Products: Self-directed Violence

Gattu Jain has raised an important point in his e-mail – the use of tobacco and tobacco products by Jains. He says that our religious leaders emphasize that Jains should avoid the consumption of potato and onions but they do not point out the dangers of tobacco. The Jain community in India is quite well-to-do, and a large number of Jains smoke cigarettes. Smoking is an addiction and it is extremely harmful to health. Indulging in any activity that is injurious to health is self-directed violence. We Jains believe in nonviolence and so we should refrain from activities such as smoking and drinking that constitute violence towards self and others around us.

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Facets Of The Culture Of Materialism

Presenting the five vows propagated by Jainism, Surendra Bothara states,² "In terms of actual practice, the order of the five vows should be reversed with the vow of non-possessiveness being the most important.

² Non-possessiveness (APARIGRAH): A Medicine For The Ailing Environment by Shri Surendra Bothara, Jain Study Circular, April 2008.

This vow is extremely important for the practice of celibacy, non-stealing, truthfulness and nonviolence. Without practicing non-possessiveness none of the other vows can be practiced adequately.” However, in most instances, individuals emphasize nonviolence but overlook the problems created by the mad pursuit of materialism. They tend to forget that materialism involves greed – a wolf in sheep’s clothing. Here are some instances that depict the dark side of materialism.

Benefiting From Disasters:

Surprisingly, disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis are used by big business for profit. Naomi Klein, an award-winning journalist, in the article ‘Disaster Capitalism: State of Extortion’, which appeared in The Nation of July 21, 2008, states, “And the disaster capitalists have been busy--from private firefighters already on the scene in Northern California's wildfires, to land grabs in cyclone-hit Burma, to the housing bill making its way through Congress. The bill contains little in the way of affordable housing, shifts the burden of mortgage default to taxpayers and makes sure that the banks that made bad loans get some payouts.” In the context of Iraq, the writer states, “The country is shattered, and the billions handed out in no-bid contracts to Western firms have failed to rebuild the country.” Obviously, disasters are being used as pretexts to help the rich and powerful.

Global Food Crisis:

Here is another example of the ominous effect of greed. The rising cost of food all over the world has taken families by storm. For example, the price of wheat has increased 130% last year and the price of rice has doubled in Asia. This is in spite of the fact that since 1961 the world’s cereal output has tripled, while the population has only doubled. There is enough food produced in the world to feed the population. Still, the problem is that all those who need food are not getting it at affordable prices. Evidently, there is something fundamentally wrong with our food system. We have allowed food to be transformed from something that nourishes people into a commodity for speculation and bargaining. The system puts the profits of investors before the food needs of people.

Poverty Business:

Making money off the poor is yet another consequence of the culture of materialism. On the PBS Program of August 8, 2008, Bill Moyers said, “There's always been money to be made from people who have no money. That's because low income families turn to fast, easy, and pre-

approved credit to make ends meet.” From the subprime credit card dealers and rent-to-own stores to some of the biggest financial institutions in America, all of them are making big money by exploiting the needs and desires of the working poor. The BusinessWeek magazine calls this industry "the poverty business." The unsuspecting poor are the losers in this game.

The above examples, though legitimate, show that unbridled greed on the part of business is not good for consumers who are constrained by their plight. It brings about misery and discontent in society. Commenting on the plight of the not-so-fortunate segment of society, Bill Moyers, on the PBS Program of August 29, 2008, said, “ ... workers have little to celebrate this Labor Day -- they've been falling farther behind for years now. But across the country, there are growing signs of defiance:

“You see it as California nurses pushed for universal health care... you see it as workers march in Los Angeles for a living wage...you see it in immigrants fighting back against a system that hires them to pick and prepare our food, yet pays them pitiful wages and treats them as criminals.”

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Business And Multiplicity Of Viewpoints³

by Dr. Sagar Mal Jain

Even though the function of economics is prosperity of the masses, it is the financial interest of individuals that propels the engine of business. In the field of economics, there are two main ideologies, capitalist and socialist. The latter has lost favor because it neglected the role of individual incentive in economic advancement. On the other hand, the incentive of the individual coupled with the drive for personal gains resulted in the failure to ensure the welfare of society as a whole. Moreover, consumerism took such a strong hold on the minds of individuals that prosperity of each and every member of the society was ignored. The gap between the rich and the poor increased.

The above facts led to the concept that economic progress depends on enhancing personal wants, desires and needs. This, in turn, resulted in selfishness and exploitation in the field of business and industry. Expansion of needs and fulfillment of endless desires became the stimulus and catalyst for economic progress. There has been a considerable

³ English adaptation of an excerpt from ‘Multi-dimensional Application of ANEKAANTAVAAD’ published by PARSHVANATH VIDYAPEETH, Varanasi, 1999, pages xlvi-xlvii.

increase in accumulation of material goods and means of comfort. Consequently, men have become slaves of the culture of consumerism. Wants and desires of men know no limit, and considerable material progress has been accomplished. But this phenomenon has vitiated the inner being of man. In pursuit of materialism, man has lost his inner peace. This is because desires are endless - multiplying day by day. These are the consequences of focusing solely on materialism, disregarding other aspects of life.

In view of the above, it is evident that in the various fields of human endeavor, such as economics, business, politics and religion, no genuine success can be achieved without analyzing a given situation from different angles and adopting multiplicity of viewpoints, because man is the focus of all these activities. We will not succeed in our efforts unless we appreciate that, in general, human psyche is multidimensional. Thus the concept of multiplicity of viewpoints is essential for advancing the well-being of the entire humanity. No viewpoint should be ignored. We should strive to achieve a synthesis of various standpoints. The multiplicity of viewpoints presents prudent alternatives.

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Religion In The Age Of Materialism⁴

(Reprinted from the Jain Study Circular, October 1989)

During the past 200 years or so, life has changed so much that the traditional culture is virtually on the defensive against the onslaught of the technological culture. What C. P. Snow has written about 'two cultures' in the context of the western society is now fast becoming a reality even in this country [India]. Technology has created complications for life, the simple carefree life of the traditional people having been replaced by one whose very basis is care, tension, competitive ostentation, externalism and the sleeping pill. When life is such, to many, any religious prescription has become meaningless, incongruous and anachronistic in this age. The socialists have gone to the length of denouncing religion as opium. ... But then a moment comes in life when man becomes conscious of the hollowness of the materialistic culture, when he is caught up in a stagnation of his own making and is a prey of his own machines. At such a moment, he turns from the technological to the traditional culture to seek solace and peace. This is why the prescriptions of religion, though old, are not yet too old to be discarded as impotent and worthless. They are still a living word, not replaced by anything more enchanting and more noble, so that they are still a beacon-light to show the way, sure, unflinching and infallible.

⁴ Reprinted from K. C. Lalwani's English translation of DASHVAIKAALIK SUTRA, published by Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1973, page xii.