

A New Utopia: Promoting Dialogue for a Humane and Sustainable Society

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In the words of Mary Engelbreit, she said “If you don’t like something, change it. If you cannot change it, change the way you think about it.” Today, we live in such a world where people have differentiations in everything. What we think, what we say and what we decide matters a lot today. In such times, we think about what others think about us and nothing else matters. We want to have a perfect image in front of everyone. However, that is nearly impossible.

Similarly, in this present world, everyone wants a utopian world, an imagined place where everything is perfect. This is both possible and impossible in many ways. It is possible, for a perfect world to exist to some extent but for a complete perfect world to exist, is impossible. It is impossible because the society we live in has become a society of division. If we see around us, everything is fragmented into pieces and to join the pieces back is a rather tedious task. For a utopian world to be there, we need to accept our mistakes, try to improve them and move on with a striving spirit to not give up on anything. We try to imagine a utopian world and when we come back to the real life, we forget about it and it vanishes. Why can we not have a perfect world, where there is no violence at all?

For a humane and sustainable society to be there, we need to bring a change. A change should not only be bought within ourselves, but also towards our approach. We all know for a fact that, in the past we have had a lot of wars, riots, etc. I do not understand what do people gain from all this violence? Does it benefit them in any way? Terrorism has become another excuse for these inhuman, heartless terrorists to kill people, in the name of religion. Terrorism has been on a steady increase,

year by year. Today, we need peace and harmony among the people, who are living in different parts of the world. However, there is also a truth that somehow the whole of humankind has to live together like a family in peace and harmony. To bring peace and harmony, we need to start caring for each other and not bring hatred among ourselves.

The word humane means to be merciful, benevolent and sympathetic. A humane society requires harmony not only between the different strata of the population, of the society and between traditional and modern systems, but also between people and nature. It also means non-violence against people, animals and the environment. Hence sustainable development becomes an integral part of a humane society. Only a humanistic education system combines science, engineering and technology with humanities, social sciences and liberal arts. Only then and then, such critical thinkers, intellectuals, conscience-keepers and revolutionaries can be produced, who can understand and draw inspiration from the past, live in the present and develop a vision for the future and contribute to the creation of Vasudhaiva kutumbakam. Vasudhaiva kutumbakam is a phrase drawn from ancient Indian Vedic literature, which means global family. However for a humane society to exist is both a utopian and a practical idea. When an equitable and just society is created, it also requires an equitable and non-discriminatory education system. Where, people from different strata of society enjoy equal opportunities to pursue their educational aspirations, to become effective partners in development and to contribute to the development of a humane society.

Sustainable development shows a connection between economic, social and environmental pillars in this modern technological society. Because sustainable development model contains a personal meaning to every individual there are many definitions of the concept. Tolba “Sustainability is when you leave the world better than you found it, take no more than you need, try not to harm life or the environment, make amends if you do”. A sustainable society is one

that ensures health and vitality of human life and culture for present and human generations. Such a society acts to stop the activities that serve to destroy human life and culture. It encourages those activities that serve to conserve what exists, restore what has been damaged and prevent future harm.

Today in the present paradigm, neo-classical economics have become a language of politics, a language with no moral sense and it has limited importance to the real economic circumstances and situations. During this process, we tend to ignore values and ethics. The numbers of poor in the world continue to grow in spite of extensive official assistance efforts. Even in the wealthy economies of the world, 100 million people still live in poverty. The signs of unsustainability donot know any political boundaries and they arenot limited to any economic, political or social system. We as a society and the people present in the society have failed to accept nature as a model. Rather, what we do is show disdain for nature and its forces and we believe that we can manage and master it. We have failed to distinguish between growth and development. A recent World Bank report noted that when something grows, it gets quantitatively bigger; when it develops, it gets qualitatively better. Our planet is developing over time without growing. We as people have failed to consider the future generations, whose well-being defines the core of sustainable world.

For a humane and sustainable society to also exist, we need to look back on the drawbacks, which the society is facing as a whole. There are various issues of environmental deterioration, oppression and violence. There is also gender and racial oppression which becomes dominative over someone. Violence is a broad term, which includes many things like child and spouse abuse, domestic violence, war, disdain for the environment and many more. Equity and justice within and between different communities has been identified as central for a humane and sustainable society. Animal abuse has also become a huge problem. There

are many organizations, which are working specifically to protect animals. People beat animals, torture them, make them starve and also kill them. Why is this done? These inhuman, cruel people abuse animals for various reasons like for the purpose of poaching, hunting, entertainment and lab testing. Each year hundreds and thousands of animals are being abused. There is dog fighting, which takes place around the world and it has become a problem. It is a felony in the United States but it hasn't yet stopped. There are thousands of horses, which are slaughtered every year for human consumption. Animal abuse can be stopped by us humans only if we take charge. Instead we do not care at times and ignore the fact. We can report animal abuse or we can volunteer to take care of animals. Let us start caring for others and eventually everything will fall into place.

For a humane and sustainable society to come into existence there are various aims and goals a society needs to establish. There are economic, political, cultural, social and ecological goals. Economic goals would include creation of jobs that enhance nature of work. Secondly, there should be fair distribution of income among people. There should be economic self-sufficiency at community, national and international levels.

Social and cultural goals include, there should be equity and justice among everyone. Secondly, there should be full status for all, irrespective of race, class, caste, gender and age. Thirdly, there should be maintenance of cultural diversity and respect for the indigenous people.

Political goals would include, political security including, communities participating and also solving various problems they would face. Secondly, there should be strategic security, in order for the community to defend itself against external threat whether it's economic or political.

Ecological goals would include, ecological stability planning with emphasis on waste reduction than waste management. Secondly, there should be

balance between of ecological debt within and among countries. Thirdly, there should be maintenance of biodiversity and population stabilization.

The environmental movement began to gradually change. They had focused more on ecological issues and little attention was paid towards economic, sociocultural and political issues. In time, a sustainability movement began to take shape, building upon the elements of an environmental movement. It was directed more towards systems rather than single issues and focused on long term trends than events. Qualitative change was the goal and not quantitative change. It was associated with social justice, equity and respect for nature central with its world view. The movement also included race, ethnicity, gender, class and age.

Population stabilization became an important objective for sustainability. There was serious attention given towards the betterment of women regarding their fertility and better environmental quality. A systematic approach was needed for the population situation in order for development to take place. In the process of development, it would improve the lives of the people and demand for goods and services would increase at the same time.

Technology is both a boon and bane in our lives. Today, everyone would accept somewhere or the other, that without technology, we cannot survive. Technology has made use of resources, increased efficiency, and improved signals and also has contributed to the quality of life rather than quantity of life. People became more cautious towards development of technology. Thus, technology has proved to be a savior for all of us.

In a community, where hundreds of thousands of people live together, for them to survive is a big thing. 'Struggle locally, dream globally' expresses the central place of community in a society. In the United States, political reform and public financing of elections had become an important element of sustainability. During this process, the candidates who were willing to take on the tedious task of listening to the problems of the people, and leading them improved.

A world stands for humanism, for tolerance, for progress, for the adventure of ideas and the search for truth. It stands for the onward march of the human race towards higher objectives. If the world discharges their duties adequately, then all is well with the nation and the people. The most important objective of education in Asia has been to inculcate universal human values and to prepare the citizens for the creation of a humane world. Excellence, equity, justice, compassion, caring and harmony were the underpinning values of the ancient universities in countries like India. Nalanda, Takshashila (also known as Taxila) and Vikramaditya in India stand as a testimony to this. In this current era of globalization, the pace of change has been dramatic. Nations and social systems are in rapid transition. Continuities with the past are rarely found. Traditional values gave in to new values.

In the case of Bhutan, it has been aspiring for 'human happiness', while most of the societies, today place undue emphasis on materialistic development and the purpose of education. It is redefined to orient it towards the creation of materialistic prosperity as against human values of utmost and universal significance. Few societies, are aiming at creating a balance between materialistic values and intangible basic human values. Education is considered merely as a medium for the creation of economic wealth. Even theories and methods of research in education, in addition to policy approaches, are seriously influenced by neoliberal approaches.

In order for us to continue to appreciate the quality of life, we must meet supply and demand without destroying the environment for future generations. Since new trends have come up and the old values which have made people sustain in the society, are being forgotten; humanism has to be brought back to be the pivot of human society.

In the 21st century, humanity has been questioned? People need to understand that it is not too late to give up on hatred and start loving and caring for each other. The only true religion would be love and respect for other people. World War I literally hit the world like never before and

it was one of the greatest watersheds of the 20th century geopolitical history. While, the war lasted from 1914 to 1918, it continued to define the status of world politics until the Second World War. Approximately, 1.3 million Indian soldiers served in World War One, and over 74,000 of them lost their lives. World War I led to the fall of four great imperial dynasties (Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Turkey) and destabilized European society.

A technocentric view that nature is both infinite supplies of physical resources, that is. raw materials, energy, soil, air and water which is, used for the benefit of humanity. The more industrialized a country is or more a developing country try to mimic Western industrial cultures the more that country's receiving environment declines "due to pollution and ecological degradation."

Since economics had become the new language of politics, it was important to revamp definitions of 'economy' and 'economics' The ecosystem can no longer be seen as a different parameter to the economic system. Ecosystem has to take full account of the health of the population and the nature, too. Economics and the ecosystem can be connected to each other in many ways. The population of a nation contributes towards the gross domestic product, which leads to growth and development of an economy.

It is the political system, which reflects the values of a society, which should decide what is to be protected and preserved for the present and the future. Poverty reduction became a self-conscious effort and a high priority in the whole world. Explicit attention was directed towards the ways, growth could in fact contribute to equity within a market economy. Designing plans and programs, to achieve limited term growth and long term development with equity, was understood to be one of the most important challenges faced by societies, during the twentieth century. What we want to encourage among all is, employment and income. We began to modify our system of taxation

to tax what we want to discourage, which included resource depletion and waste, in all of its manifestations.

There were issues related to General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) helped us to understand that trade served to undermine self-reliance and had serious labor and environmental implications. To contribute towards sustainability, trade had to serve environmental, social and political goals of all nations and communities. This required the overcoming of neoclassical terms and concepts that became an obstacle in the way of sustainability. Terms like ‘comparative advantage’ and ‘specialization’ because they contributed to the destruction of biological and cultural diversity.

Through education, one can gain knowledge and techniques to understand that government policies and social structures have put pressure on our environment. This is the most serious challenge most systems of education – particularly higher education systems in Asian countries - face. In the era of globalization this quest becomes more imperative as we need good quality global citizens and production of good global citizens is the responsibility of education systems. In order to develop a humanistic society, a humane educational system is absolutely essential. A fragile under-developed system of education based on weak foundations has been found to be a serious drawback in national development, in ensuring political stability, social harmony and economic growth.

Literature on comparative education both within the region and in the world at large has also shown that countries with strong public education systems, including specifically strong public higher education systems, have the capacity to ensure harmony, peace and prosperity among and to their people. Education systems need to be carefully nurtured towards this goal and also traditional values need to be implemented. Market-based models of education systems that rely on financing by students

and private players hinder the growth of an equitable education system and a just society. There is a significant shift in the perception of education from it being a public good, a global public good, to a private good, a commodity that can be subject to all, even the vulgar, principles of markets.

During the period of post-socialism and neoliberalism, this is happening rapidly even in some of the tradition-bound societies and erstwhile communist societies. Even theories and methods of research in education, in addition to policy approaches, are seriously influenced by neoliberal approaches. The familiar contours of globalization are rarely challenged.

Tools such as sustainability indicators and the ecological footprint would encourage one to take appropriate decisions to change their behavior over environment. Technological advancement increases efficiency rather than increasing output. Renewable sources should not be harvested at rates that exceed regeneration rates (sustained yield). Waste emissions should not exceed the absorbing capacity of the receiving environment. Non-renewable resources should never be exploited faster than the rate of creation of renewable substitutes. One thing is certain, that our present trajectory as a human community is not sustainable. Pessimism being a self-fulfilling prophecy, optimism is the only course. The answers to human problems of ecology are to be found in the economy. If necessity is the mother of invention, then the crisis which we face now will surely be the mother of new vision.

Sustainable development should not be an indefinite concept but pushed to the forefront, of all nations to educate the youth of today, as they will be the adults of tomorrow and show them that the current neoclassical is un-sustainable. Accommodating techno centric believes in conservation, managing of natural resources and they believe in the “green economy, green markets” guided by economic instruments.

Green GNP calculates the loss of biodiversity and the effects of climate change in monetary terms. Yes, there are finite resources such as oil and coal, but it is possible to develop new technologies to substitute these resources.

To conclude, one can say that for a humane and sustainable society to exist, we need to end poverty, in all its forms everywhere. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being, for all at all ages and promote lifelong opportunities. Then and only then we can achieve a humane and sustainable society.