

Respect to Nature and Mother Earth and Sustainability

- Dr. G.P. Rao

Dr. S.S.Yadav's telephone call stating that Thar India, the NGO of which he is the founder, was bringing out a quarterly journal, Nature and Society, and that I should contribute an article to the journal made me think as to how to go about.

A spontaneous look at the title of the Journal, Nature and Society, made me think of the title's relation with the emergence, survival and growth of human institutions over a period. It is the ongoing balance and continuous fine tuning between nature and society (representing people) that has contributed to the emergence of human societies world over. Maintenance of the said balance fostered their survival and growth. Wilful or ignorant neglect of the said balance over a period of time arrested their growth. Continuous and mindless destruction of the said balance at universal level resulted in 'rape of the mother earth', ecological degradation, disturbances in the cycles of seasons and the possible extinction of human race and its institutions – if even now necessary remedial and preventive measures are not strengthened and initiated as top most priority by all stakeholders concerned.

The above thought of the inseparability of nature with human beings, as reflected in the concept of Oum (oneness) and cosmic consciousness, and the impending catastrophe to the humankind in the event of the continued denudation of the mother earth I had experienced again recently at the Ashram of Swami Om Poorna Swatantra located near Pilani, Rajasthan. The day was the wintry afternoon of November 14 2014; and occasion was a periodic meeting of more than 40 Kisan leaders in the form of Pradhans from adjoining two to three districts of Rajasthan. The agenda was to discuss, under the guidance of Swamiji, as to how to enhance agricultural productivity – in the backdrop of ever increasing environmental degradation and destruction of ecological balances perpetrated by greedy and powerful political and economic interests. The sharing of knowledge and experiences of the Kisan leaders on the brutal manner in which the natural resources like minerals, water, soil and even sand was abused was heart rending. The add on by the experts attending the meeting on the dark future if remedial measures are not undertaken even now made the atmosphere all the more sombre.

The issue therefore is what is to be done. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the second President of Indian Republic and a great scholar, once said that it is the man who creates problems; therefore it is who is to solve them. The cause of impending doom is the human action – inaction, non action, and wrong action, to be more appropriate. Changed action, and more important, changed mind set, or attitude only can bring in the cure.

It was rather significant, in this context, that I came across in a matter of a few days two statements echoing very similar opinion on the issue: one from a seer; and the other from a hardboiled no nonsense task master.

Sri Sri Ravi Shanker: “The air doesn’t see boundaries; similarly the ill effects of climate change also are not restricted to boundaries. Only inner climate change can create the attitude to deal effectively with externalities”. Maruti Suzuki Sustainability Reports are titled as Sustainability Journey – Making it matter. Strengthening self, supporting partners and spreading the sustainability constitute the three pronged approach to reach the desired goal of sustainable growth and sustainable life. The next step is to focus specifically on strengthening self and changing inner climate with reference to respect to nature and mother earth, and their relationship with sustainability. Strengthening self and inner climate change, I submit, are to be understood in the backdrop of what I call as incredibility in human nature.

Human beings are incredible. They have innate divinity in them. They are basically good. They are therefore inclined to be of help to others- without always necessarily anticipating any return for their help.

From here itself, the human incredibility begins. Whether the human beings are aware of these noble qualities in them, or not, we are not sure. The nature and extent of awareness or otherwise of these qualities varies from person to person, time to time and place to place. This is the first incredibility in human beings.

Whenever and whoever is aware of these qualities, may or may not be making use of these qualities for the good of themselves and – more certainly of others. This is the second human incredibility.

Whenever and whoever is doing good to others, chances are that they overestimate the goodness they have done to others. This is the third incredibility.

When the human beings feel that the good they have done to others is not reciprocated properly, they may not be inclined to do good again in future. This is the fourth incredibility.

More important, however, is that this is the first occasion when human being is willy nilly acting against the noble quality of doing good to others without necessarily looking forward for any return. This incredibility of being cautious and calculative while helping others on the part of a human being in turn erodes his basic goodness, the second noble quality endowed to him. This is the fifth incredibility of human beings.

The dent in one’s basic goodness eats, over a period of time, the innate divinity in human beings. And sooner than later the divinity in human beings is replaced by the devilry. The childlike simple, innocent and inquisitive nature of human beings is eclipsed by childish impulsiveness, insensitivity and greed. This is the sixth

incredibility of human beings. This also tragically symbolizes the self negation by human beings of all the three major noble qualities, viz. innate divinity, basic goodness and intrinsic altruism, endowed upon them. These are the incredibilities which understandably have had been baffling – who else, human beings themselves! Galileo Galilei, the great scientist, for instance, states: “I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who has endowed us with sense, reason and intellect has intended us to forget them.”

The first dimension of human incredibility, we had been mentioning, about the human beings being at the same time being aware and unaware of their noble qualities. When we turn to the human beings unaware of their innate divinity, basic goodness and intrinsic altruism, it is not that they are really not aware of these qualities. They are aware, for some reasons or the other; they are not able to translate these attributes into action. The possible reasons could be inadequate strength of willingness and/ or inadequate possession of abilities consisting of knowledge and skills. They have, in other words, these qualities embedded in them; but not willing enough or able to project these qualities through their sayings and doings. As has been proved empirically more than once, awareness is not always accompanied by action. This is the seventh incredibility of human beings.

The question, then, is as to who should enable the human beings to ignite, rekindle, and activate the innate divinity, basic goodness and intrinsic altruism in them for the good of others. The others may help. The trigger however should come from within, the self. This truism is not always known to the human beings. This is the eighth incredibility of human beings.

What is the way out? A question, it is said, contains its own answer. The question posed earlier in the context of the eighth incredibility was, who should ‘activate’ the dormant goodness of human beings. The answer was ‘self.’ The way out is therefore to be the human beings themselves. The first step is thus to be taken by the human beings at their individual levels. Back to self, has not surprisingly become, so to say, a buzzword!

How can we, in other words, as Mahatma Gandhi stated, remake ourselves as human beings. This in other words is the significance of the expressions, ‘strengthening self’ and ‘changing inner climate’.

Coming to respect to the nature and mother earth, we find that it has been enshrined in Indian culture, ethos and even Indian psyche. In the ancient past, and even today in the rural side and in tribal and hill regions where civilization and modernity has not yet ‘crept in’, nature is still worshipped and its equilibrium with the human beings is still preserved with earnestness. All living organisms and even non organic entities like the five elements of nature (‘panch bhoota’), viz. Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Ether, are revered.

But perhaps the best description of respect to nature I have ever come across relates to the one offered by Eleonora Duse, the Italian actress, 1858 – 1920. She said: “If the sight of the blue sky fills you with joy, if a blade of grass springing up in the fields has power to move you, if the simple things of nature have a message that you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive.”

The lost respect to nature and mother earth needs to be restored – restored fast. The task however cannot be accomplished fast. Since the task involves attitudinal change, it needs consistent and continuous efforts commencing from the infancy of the child wherein family and society have to play a pivotal role.

It is however encouraging to note that youngsters, as much as their elder colleagues have realized the need to propagate and inculcate respect to nature and mother earth as a human value as a means of restoring sustainability in human living and life. In an ongoing research study on synergy of human values in India and the west, for instance, a young executive in an IT enterprise, stated that ‘Lot of care has been taken abroad not to change nature, but in the name of development we are playing with nature.’. The eighteen respondents participating in the study accorded first position to the said human value, thereby indicating its importance in their vision of a strong values oriented Indian enterprise.

Sustainability could be defined, following Google Search Engine, as an ability or capacity of something to be maintained or to sustain itself. It's about taking what we need to live now, without jeopardising the potential for people in the future to meet their needs. If an activity is said to be sustainable, it should be able to continue forever.