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DEBT OF GRATITUDE

October 2 is a different day. Not just in the lives of the billion plus people of India. In every home and every part of the world where people think and talk of peace and compassion, Gandhi Jayanthi is an occasion to pay homage to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi. Humanity, wrote a famous scholar, owes a heavy debt of gratitude to Gandhiji . The greatest minds of the last hundred years tried to explore and explain the mind, the message and the mission of the Mahatma even if the attempt was fascinating, puzzling and even frustrating to some. But all were agreed that no one, no saint for that matter, "has done so much to lighten the misery of the oppressed and restore their self-respect". Among the extraordinary qualities of his head and heart were humility and humour which endeared him to millions all over the world. " I have nothing new to teach the world," he declared in utmost humility, "Truth and Non-Violence are as old as the hills." These two were the guiding principles of his life, the pursuit of which was his mission till his last breath. Men can overcome misery, cruelty and violence by truth and non-violence. That is the message of his life and death. Satyagraha is both a science and an art of overthrowing evil with good. Happiness does not lie in possessiveness and victory is not success. Gandhiji explained the evolution of Satyagraha and his own travails in propagating it when he referred to the five stages -indifference, ridicule, abuse, repression and respect. It is the soul force that triumphed over an empire on which the sun was expected not to set.

He could laugh at himself and make fun of his own persona. "Mine is a mad house," he once said, " and I am the maddest of the lot. But those who cannot see the good in these mad people should have their eye examined." In a land of paradoxes he described himself as the biggest paradox. Religion to Gandhiji was 'not a Sunday show, but hourly, minutely mentor and monitor.' His religion begins where doctrine ceases, explained a scholar. An authority on psychology Erikson described Gandhiji as ' a

religious actualist' who made 'an alliance of his inner voice and the voice of mankind.' His attitude towards religions was' not one of negative toleration but positive appreciation.' He respected all religions though no religion was perfect. " The Allah of Islam is the same as the God of the Christians and Isvara of the Hindus. Even as there are numerous names of God in Hinduism there are names of God in Islam. The names do not indicate individuality but attributes. God is above all attributes, Indescribable, Immeasurable. It would be height of intolerance and intolerance is a species of violence to believe that your religion is superior to other religions." To him there is no God other than Truth and that can be realised through Ahimsa or non-violence. Death has no terror to the God-fearing. He found no incompatibility between man's physical and intellectual limitations and his capacity for spiritual progress. People of all faiths attended Gandhiji's prayer-meetings and an instance of the Mahatma's hold over them was what a visitor from abroad wrote: "The best Christian in the world today is a Hindu and he lives at Sevagram." Gandhiji undertook fasts for causes big and small. His idea was not to embarrass anyone or authority but ' to sting people's conscience into action.'

Violence confronted him, as his grandson narrated in his biography, at every stage in his long life, right from the hard struggles in South Africa till his last breath on January 30 1948. The answer to violence is non-violence, only non-violence. A week before his assassination Gandhiji told Edgar Snow that non-violence is a political means, not only a matter of personal ethics. That was a few days after a bomb was hurled at his house and seven days before Godse's bullets did what the bomb could not. The frail body gently bled to death and the mortal remains were consigned to holy flames in the midst of inconsolable grief. No one can ever silence that spirit. As Radhakrishnan summed up "nothing better has ever been taught or lived since the world first began."

- The Editor

Gandhiji never preached what he did not practise. — RAJAJI

MEDIA SHOULD SET SOCIAL AGENDA

Mr. N. Ram's address (at CPS on September 18, 2006.)

"Mediapersons have a great role to play in society by connecting themselves to issues concerning people," Mr. N. Ram, Editor-in-chief of The Hindu Group of Publications, observed here on Monday

Speaking on the emerging trends in media under the auspices of the Centre of Policy Studies at the Visakhapatnam Public Library premises, he recalled that precisely this was the role that newspapers and journals played during the freedom struggle. In what he described as the 'Media bazaar', there was enough space for every journalist to perform the five vital functions of "telling the truth; upholding the freedom of the press subject, of course, to reasonable restrictions; ensuring justice and fairplay; humaneness in approach; and contributing to social good", he said. Mr. Ram felt that besides upholding the traditional values India is famous for values like pluralism or unity in diversity, journalists should concentrate on fighting fundamentalist tendencies dividing society in the name of caste, religion and language, and develop public-spiritedness towards achieving social transformation and social good. They should also have a rational approach while highlighting various issues.

Analysing the role of media, he said that journalists should set agenda for society by providing credible information, functioning like a watchdog on policy implementation and educating people. Another notable trend in the media, Mr. Ram, said, was the emergence of an internal ombudsman to serve as a forum for projecting readers' grievances in respect of inaccuracies in reports and lack of impartiality in comments. "The Hindu is the first newspaper in India to appoint a reader's editor on the lines of the one in the 'Guardian' in the UK," he pointed out. Unlike in the developed countries, where the print media "is in a state of gloom about its future" because youngsters in the UK, the US, and the Scandinavian countries have practically stopped reading newspapers and watching TV, he said that in India, the situation was not that alarming. "With the reach of newspapers in only to the extent of 65 per 1,000 population and TV about 11 million, there is ample scope for growth of all types of media in this country."

A significant fact in the growth of newspapers in India, according to him, is that newspapers in Hindi and other languages are steadily improving their reach. In this connection, he mentioned the phenomenal success of papers like 'Dainik Jagran' and 'Dainik Bhaskar' in Hindi and 'Eenaadu' in Telugu.

- Courtesy : Bay News

NEWSPAPERS, TELEVISION ON THE DECLINE IN DEVELOPED NATIONS

Gloom in mature media markets with the spread of Net: N. Ram

With new media platforms emerging, newspapers and broadcast television in developed countries are on the decline, Editor-in-Chief of The Hindu, N. Ram said. Narrow cast technology, niche audience and specialised channels are gaining ground.

Speaking on "State of the media – trends and issues" at a meeting organised by the Centre for Policy Studies here on Monday, he said there was gloom in mature media markets with the spread of new media in the form of the Internet. The spread of newspapers had reached saturation levels in the developed countries whereas in India it was a picture of growth, though with a very low base of 65 copies per 1,000 population, against 800 in Scandinavian countries.

READERS MIGRATING

On the other hand, India's Internet users were only 11 million against 123 million in China and 220 million in the United States. There were fears that the Internet was eroding the base of the newspapers, radio and broadcast TV. "The readers are migrating depending upon access to Internet and broadband and it will have a big impact on how news is covered and what the readers' preferences are," Mr. Ram said. However, readers were going to stay and only the platforms would change. But, India had the time to adjust without making the mistakes newspapers and television stations made in those countries. Mr. Ram said an important function of newspapers was to provide credible information by accurately sourcing it. He said media should influence agenda-building to promote discussion on issues that matter without dumbing them down. The real future of the media lay in creating a

template for discussion. While keeping in view the plurality of the country, he said truth-telling, factuality, accuracy and careful analysis should be given priority in reporting.

FREEDOM, INDEPENDENCE

He said an important principle was that of freedom and independence. While the press had by and large enjoyed freedom, there was no broadcast law. He favoured a liberal framework for broadcast TV and the powers not to be vested with police officials. Another principle was that of justice which was more than fairness, he said, and added that Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's theory of entitlements would be useful to journalists. The media should also tune into issues like reservation, rural distress and starvation and be on the side of peace, harmony and resolution of conflict. Centre for Policy Studies Director A. Prasanna Kumar described The Hindu as the most credible newspaper and a most durable institution with fairness and justice as two guiding principles. CPS Chairman B. Swamy and Visakhapatnam Public Library Secretary V. Sitaramayya participated

- Courtesy : The Hindu, 19-09-2006

STUDENTS' QUERIES FOCUS ON KEY ISSUES

VISAKHAPATNAM: It was a lively interaction between students and citizens and Editor-in-chief of The Hindu N. Ram at a meeting the Centre for Policy Studies organised at Visakhapatnam Public Library here on "Media Trends" on Monday. Student's questions focused on various contentious, current issues and those that concern them like their taking active interest in politics. Students of Sri Satya Sai Vidya Vihar, Ramnath Secondary School, NSTL, St. Joseph's High School for Girls and Timpany schools participated. One of them wanted to know whether students should take part in politics and student unions should be affiliated to political parties. Mr. Ram said students should inform themselves about issues that matter and politics and it's up to them later whether to get involved or not. But there was no place for goondaism, he said in an apparent reference to the recent incident leading to the death of a professor in Ujjain.

On the contentious issue of reservation, he answered that since people were facing discrimination on the basis of an unjust social order, fair equality of opportunity should be provided for quite a long time. No political party was

opposed to it though there were differences on the creamy layer, etc, he pointed out and cited efforts to compensate by increasing the number of seats meant for other sections. To a question on the Prime Minister and the UPA Chairperson not participating in singing Vande Mataram on its "centenary," Mr. Ram said it was a mistaken notion of the centenary. On NAM's relevance, he said India should lead the resistance to the war in Iraq, threats to Iran and the crisis in Lebanon.

- Courtesy: The Hindu, 19-9-2006

MEET ON URBAN GOVERNANCE

VISAKHAPATNAM: Greater Visakha with an area of 530 sq.km. (110 sq. km. till recently) is second only to Delhi in area, with the largest urban forest in the country, according to Municipal Commissioner N. Srikant. At a meeting on 'Urban governance with special reference to Vizag' organised by the Centre for Policy Studies recently, he said lack of proper planning was resulting in the growth of slums and public apathy has contributed to congestion and haphazard development of colonies.

Mr. Srikant said the five basic requirements of urban development were proper transportation system, street lighting, water supply, drainage and sewerage system. He underlined the need for a master plan for future development. Allaying fears of a rise in house taxes, he said the municipal tax tariff was among the lowest in the country and Vijayawada with an area of just 50 sq. km was netting more than Rs. 45 crores with a population of six lakhs against Vizag's Rs. 28 crores with a population of 14. lakhs. The Commissioner said metering water supply would ensure equity and steps were being taken to eliminate arbitrary evaluation of property.

The commissioner conceded that during the last five years roads had been dug up due to one reason or the other and said steps were being taken to complete the entire process soon.

- Courtesy: The Hindu, 6-9-2006

SEDIMENT BUILD-UP IN RIVER RESERVOIRS

- Prof. M.N. Sastri

Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Karnataka suffered heavy losses from the recent floods caused by the sudden release of water from the river dams in the wake of heavy rains. This measure was unavoidable to save the

dams. The surging floodwaters submerged vast areas including cities down stream. Hundreds of people perished. The diamond city of Surat, the temple towns of Bhadrachalam and Pandharpur and the fertile Konaseema were under water for a several days. The loss to the economy is put at well over fifty thousand crores.

Construction of river dams is a global activity for impoundment of water for flood control, irrigation, power generation, industry, household use and recreation. More than 45,000 large dams at least 15 metres high have so far been constructed. Together these large dams are capable of holding about 15 percent of the water carried by the rivers each year. There are nearly 2,500 large dams in India. The storage capacity of a dam ranges from 1,500 million cubic metres (Idukki) to 2,04,800 million cubic metres (Owen Falls, Uganda). When water input from the catchment area exceeds the capacity of the reservoir, water is released, some times without warning, causing floods downstream. Floods have ceased to be natural disasters. They have turned into man-made disasters.

The life of a river reservoir depends on sediment accumulation. All rivers contain sediments. Actually a river is a body of flowing sediments as much as one of flowing water. When river water becomes still behind a dam, the sediment consisting of silt, clay, sand, gravel and bits of detritus it contains sinks to the bottom. As the material accumulates in the reservoir and the dam gradually loses its ability to store water for the purpose for which it is built. The proportion of a river's total sediment load captured by a large dam ranges between 90 and 100 percent depending on its size, location and other factors. Prediction of sedimentation rate is extremely difficult because sediment flows vary widely with temperature, rainfall, weathering and erosion, deforestation in the catchment area, and human activities. It is estimated that human activities such as modern farming, mining, roads for transport and tourism exceed erosion from natural processes. Chemical weathering that leads to sediment formation in temperate zones occurs slowly while in the tropics it is twenty of fifty times faster. In the absence of reliable data, sedimentation rates taken into consideration while panning a dam can only be considered approximate. Large reservoirs in the US, which lie in the temperate zone, lose storage capacity at an average rate of around 0.2 percent per year while those in tropical zones in Asia lose capacities up to 2.3 percent per year. On an average

the global storage capacity of the world's rivers is reduced annually through the accumulation of sediment to an extent of 50 cu.km. By 1986, around 1,100 cu.km. of sediment has settled down in the reservoirs, consuming almost one-fifth of the global reservoir storage capacity. With rising sediment content and reduction in the storage capacity of the reservoir, there is a rising danger of water overflow from the dam causing floods downstream. Several major rivers such as Ganga, Indus, Brahmaputra, Yangtze, and Mekong that emanate from the Tibetan Plateau carry 25 percent of the sediments that reach the world's oceans through these rivers while the area they drain is less than 5 percent of world's total surface area. This material is the product of chemical weathering from the torrential rains containing dissolved carbon dioxide in the form of carbonic acid. Sedimentation in the Three Gorges Reservoir over Yangtze (China), one of the biggest rivers in world, is occurring at the rate of 330 million tonnes per year. If not checked this could seriously reduce the life-span of the reservoir. Nearly half of the sediment comes from the Jinsha River, a tributary. Four dams are now being built over Jinsha River to protect the Three Gorges Reservoir.

Data collected by India's Central Power and Irrigation Board in 1995 indicates that several major river dams in India are filling up with sediments at rates 130 percent to 2293 percent faster than the assumed rates. Some examples are, Beas Unit II (333.3%), Bhakra (139.86%). Hirakud (141.67%), Nizam sagar (2293.10%), Ram ganga (424.24%), Tungabhadra (152.45%), and Ukai (536.9%). One notable exception is the Machkund Reservoir, which is filling up at 65.9 percent of the estimated value. The 39 meter-high Maneri Dam on the Bhagirathi River in Uttarakhand is already filled up to its crest level. A similar fate is expected for the proposed 85 meter-high Shrinagar Dam on the Alaknanda River. The prestigious 260 metre-high Tehri Dam is predicted to be filled with sediment in 30 years! Based on the present sedimentation rates, the loss in capacity of major river reservoirs in India at the end of the years 2000, 2025 and 2050 is projected to reach 17.68%, 29.93% and 39.81% respectively. With such a trend, the present century could end up with a majority of large dams filled up with sediments and not water for irrigation, power generation or household use. During the monsoon season the overflowing dams could cause more and more severe floods instead of controlling them. The Central and State Governments should wake up to this

4 Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow. - Bertrand Russell

danger and initiate steps to preserve the storage capacity of the river reservoirs through appropriate strategies. Once these dams become ineffective through sediment deposit it is impossible to replace them for want of suitable alternative locations. The severe water shortages experienced by numerous villages due to the siltation of ponds through decades of neglect (e.g. Kondakarla near Ankapalli) should be an eye opener.

Human Values In The Era Of Globalisation

Technology Vs Social Wisdom - II

- A. Prasanna Kumar

(From the Rt.Hon.V.S.Srinivasa Sastri Memorial Lecture delivered at Ranade Hall, Chennai on June 24,2006)

Boundaries may have disappeared because of economic and technological factors. But barriers remain between the rich and the poor. In some instances the gap between the haves and have-nots has widened. Economic reforms are being viewed with suspicion and mistrust in many countries. The benefits accruing from technological progress have not reached most of the poor people of the world. Larry Elliot summed up scathingly when he said that in the final analysis globalisation is 'rule by elites, mercantilism, and selfishness.' Peter Drucker hit the nail on the head when he said that competition brings out the best in product and the worst in man. Some of the champions of market economy, including the British Prime Minister and German Chancellor, conceded that what the world needed was market economy not market culture. Critics of globalisation point out the asymmetry of results such as riches for the west and poverty for Africa and many third world countries. If the annual budget of the United Nations is around \$4 billions, three times that amount is spent on ice cream in Europe and more than four times that amount on pet food in the US. Health and education continue to be neglected in many countries of the world. The saddest and most tragic example is that of Africa 'the history of which is written in blood and misery.'

Let us turn from markets to technology, the media in particular, and examine briefly its impact on our value system. Television, computer, fax, e mail SMS and other such inventions have come to exercise a profound influence on our lives. Our attitudes and behaviour are to a considerable extent shaped by them. Television, for instance, has become an almost indispensable part of our

daily life. Explaining its power, Moore said that TV is " a relentless agent of change; a revolutionary inflamer of appetites; an enlarger of expectations; and a diminisher of patience." Neil Postman aptly summed up the essence of the problem created by television. " The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining the subject matter but that all subject matter is painted as entertaining. Everything becomes image, nothing the substance." Visual eloquence has replaced verbal eloquence. At the international paediatrics conference held in Paris a few years ago experts pointed out how the health of school children is adversely affected by long hours of television viewing and how it affects their performance at school and in examinations. A recent study in stress at Nottingham Trent University found that watching news triggered depression, confusion , irritation, anger and anxiety. News comes at the price of your peace of mind.....Media culture can undermine our capacity to shape our destiny. Critics opine that media culture's preoccupation with violence, division and fault distorts our understanding of human nature.(Guardian Weekly Jan21-27,2005) Writing in the New Yorker Adam Gopnik pointed out the transformation of American press during the last three decades 'from an access culture to an aggression culture. The reporter used to gain status by dining with his subjects; now he gains status by dining on them.' Daniel Boorstin struck a similar note when he wrote that 'the very agency which first makes the celebrity in the long run inevitably destroys him, not by murder but by suffocation or starvation. The celebrity is born in the daily press, never loses the mark of his fleeting origin and he is a man returned to his proper anonymous station.'

The internet has triggered the first industrial revolution in history to be led by the young said an expert. New technology runs in their blood and as Chris Anderson observed youth is a rising power both at work and in society at large. Technology has accelerated change and 'the law of acceleration ' does not give time for adjustment. A sociologist referred to the frightening imbalance between the past and the future as evidenced by the fact that in some countries such as Germany, Japan, Italy and Spain those above 65 far exceed those under 15. Today's youth have become spenders before they start earning. Japanese sociologist Osamu Nakano lamented that " youth are choosing pleasure over pain, recreation over work, consumption over production and appreciation over

creation." Has competitive lavishness replaced cultural liveliness of the past? ask some. Have our schools and colleges forgotten their basic function of providing right instruction and inspiration to the students? The teacher is the moulder and the doctor is the healer and the two noblest professions seemed to have forgotten the value-system underlying them. In the words of Swami Ranganathananda " It is unfortunate that teachers in India lost faith in their own profession before our society lost faith in them." Commercialisation of education has reached alarming proportions and corporate culture governs most of our hospitals and educational institutions. *Catch and coach* for cash seems to be the motto of most of the educational institutions.

Joan Bakewell and Julina Baggini wrote a timely article titled " Behave with grace in the 21st century."(Guardian Weekly Dec 24, 2004).The daily practice of civility and politeness helps and manners and civility need to be reclaimed according to them, Let us use 'please' and 'thank you' a little more, they suggested. A fluency in manners is the best gift we can give children, according to them. Noise has eclipsed silence and it is time man and machine made less noise in public. Everyone is in a great hurry whether it is the road or the railway station or the airport. Even at hospital patients want instant treatment and cure. The most disturbing and dangerous example of hurry, noise and speed is road rage. Our roads have become battle- grounds, and at times graveyards, all because of reckless driving.

Human values are to civil society what human rights are to polity. As Eleanor Roosevelt, Chairperson of the Committee that drafted the Human Rights Declaration put it they originate at home, in school, on farm, in factory and in every place of human activity. Similarly human values are not limited by time and space. They are eternally relevant. More so in this age of awesome technological power. As C.E.M. Joad wrote "The disabling weakness of modern western civilization is the disparity between mechanical power and social wisdom." Disparity is the most potent destroyer of unity. Philosophers have agreed that India is the rainbow bridge between the wisdom of the East and the knowledge of the West. Fifty years ago great minds like Bertrand Russell and Arnold Toynbee thought that India would show the world the way out of darkness. If Radhakrishnan said that civilization has been built by seers and scientists, Jawaharlal Nehru wanted scientists to have the wisdom of the sage and the

compassion of the saint. Swami Ranganathananda wanted a humanistic direction to be given to increasing resources and his suggestion is three fold—learning to know, learning to do and learning to be. As Schumacher observed " the guidance we need cannot be found in science and technology the value of which utterly depends on the ends they serve. But it can still be found in the traditional wisdom of mankind."

A paradox of modern times is the widening gap between the rich and the poor despite tremendous progress in development. Global wealth has enormously increased. Poverty, however, has not been eradicated. Global institutions meant to eliminate poverty and inequality have failed to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. Governments, including those claiming to be liberal democracies, spend a lot of their precious money on individuals and institutions engaged in perpetuating their survival and self-interest. The 21st century, say some experts, will be dominated by the media, the educational institutions and NGOs and CSIs. Our hope lies in those institutions and individuals that are quietly carrying out welfare activities for the benefit of the poor and the needy. The words of Swami Vivekananda must be remembered and recalled. The great wandering monk said: "India's gift to the world is the light spiritual..... slow and silent, as the gentle dew that falls in the morning, unseen and unheard, bringing into blossom the fairest of roses.... yet producing a most tremendous result, has been the work of this calm, patient, all suffering spiritual race upon the world of thought."

It was John Kenneth Galbraith who wrote that a good society is at peace with itself and the world at large. Ignazio Solone aptly summed up that " on a group of theories one can find a school but on a group of values one can find a new culture, a new civilisation, a new way of living together among men." Culture is the mother of ideas, values and institutions. It is such culture that has made Chennai in particular and south India in general the home of human values. Eminent scholar and Marxist intellectual once said that the 3Rs of Indian sensibility were Rajaji, Raman and Radhakrishnan. To such genre belonged Right Honourable Srinivasa Sastri who put forth his ideal in memorable words: "Like the Mahatma I believe that force will never end force, that what is won by force is apt to be lost by force and that that alone will be a lasting gain to our race which we secure by ways of peace, by ways of

harmony and by ways of mutual help and mutual love.” I join all of you in paying homage to his memory and convey once again my grateful thanks to the members of the Srinivasa Sastri Memorial Trust for inviting me to this hallowed place.

~ Thank you ~

SCIENCE AND SPIRITUALITY - III

- Sri M. NARASIMHAPPA, IRS

Commissioner of Income Tax, Visakhapatnam.

(Lecture delivered on 20-05-06 at Centre for Policy Studies
Gayatri Vidhya Parishad)

Atoms-PEN-Light particles Tejomayam:

Science tells us that matter and energy consist of atoms, atoms consist of protons, electrons, neutrons and “P.E.N.” consist of light particles which are in a constant state of flux. So light particles are the basic units of all existence including life.

Let us now look at an ancient statement - “Sastra Vakyam”. “Visvam Parabrahma Swaroopam, parabrahma tejomayam”.

‘Tejas’ (Light) constitutes this world including life. Cosmos is a reflection of “Parabrahma” (the ultimate God principle) which is made of ‘Tejas’ (the light). Is it not interesting to observe that even the language is similar? Yes. It is so because both science and spirituality are investigating the inner truth of man, his body, his mind, his heart, his soul. As you investigate the outer - its composition, constitution - it leads you to the inner core. That is how science has met spirituality. It was said that Swami Vivekananda proclaimed that if science investigates the truth at the same pace it would reach the very same conclusions that Rishis had reached in 100 yrs. How prophetic he was?

So both science and spiritualism say the same thing. The phenomenal world - minerals, plants, animals, humans all are made up of light. Probably that is why all religions have given importance to light. We light a lamp for all functions. Zoroastrains worship ‘fire’. According to Genesis, God first said, “let there be light” (revered by Jews, Christians, Muslims). Buddha means enlightened. We are all light. To realize this truth of oneness of all creation is enlightenment. Oneness of all creation means minerals, plants, animals, humans, planets, the five elements of nature - space, air, fire, water and earth are all

fundamentally one. That is why an enlightened soul feels oneness with the whole creation. He loves all including the sinner, the wicked because he is also part of him - the whole. Out of such oneness flows love, out of love flows service, sacrifice, patience, forgiveness, tolerance - all the divine qualities. Mother is the best example before us. Father may expect from children that they should keep up his family name, tradition blah... blah.. Mother doesn't expect anything except her children's happiness. She has more love to give if the child is lagging behind others. (If that is so with a mother, will the Divine Mother or Father be less loving towards the children in difficulties? (This is of course outside the purview of this topic.)

Because of that love even ever opposing class of beings like cat & rat, snake & rat, tiger and goat sit peacefully in the presence of the enlightened soul. If one reads Ramana maharshi's life history one learns how snakes monkeys, squirrels, dogs enjoyed his presence. Once two quarrelling groups of monkeys came to him for settlement of war of succession. Now it becomes a little clear to us as to what is “Sat”, Truth. It is “Ekam Sat, Ekameva Advithiyam and Eko Narayana” - Narayana is one; ‘sivoham’ - I am Shiva because there is only Shiva - no 2s. I am also that ‘Tatvamasi’ i.e. Truth is one. We are all - the whole existence - minerals, plants, animals, humans .. are one. Love is a natural expression to one another. Love takes care of all. That is why probably the expressions - God is Truth. God is one. God is Love have evolved. This knowing is intellectual knowing but not real knowing. Real knowing is experiencing it. There is a veidc saying- Brahavid Brahmaiva Bhavathi, which means, one who knows ‘Brahman’ actually become ‘Brahman’. That means there is no other way of knowing Brahman except becoming one with ‘it’. The Advaitha concept was propounded in ‘Upanishads’, ‘Gita’ and also in the writings of Adi Sankara.

Modern exponent Sri Ramana Maharshi says ‘you are always one with the whole’. You are never away from it. You are an inalienable part and parcel of the whole. By Sadhana i.e. spiritual practices - Rajyoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, you are not to gain anything new because if you were to gain something afresh you may lose it someday. By Sadhana, you have to lose what you have i.e. ego - separate identity. Then you realize your true state of being, that is you are always part of the whole and like you all others are part of the whole - it doesn't matter whether they know it or not. That is why

Ramana Maharshi says 'you' are always the self. You are not to become self afresh. That is why the universal expressions - "Self realization" and "know Thyself" (Jesus and Buddha). You are the self. You have to realize that. You are that; I am that ("Tatvamasi" and "Aham Brahmasmi" Mahavakyas of Vedas). Many a modern man may be comfortable with the expression 'self realisation' and may not be comfortable with 'God realization' (unknown / unknowable factor), though both are the same.

You may be aware that many Mahatmas, Gurus, peethadhipathies of contemporary period, namely Paramahansa Yogananda, Sivananda Maharishi, Sankaracharya of Puri, Paul Brunton, Ganapathi Muni, have flocked to Ramana Maharshi, the great enlightened Master who shared his experiences. To my mind Ramana Maharshi made complex philosophy very simple, direct and practicable. According to him, knowing thy self should be the path. For that Maharshi has suggested self enquiry - who Am I. All our activities, success, failure, name, fame, wealth, power, happiness, revolve around the 'I'. I am this I am that I am great. I am famous or I want to be so and so. Who is this 'I'? We hardly try to know. We take it for granted. According to Maharshi, everyone experiences the 'I' in 3 states - wakefulness, dream state, deep sleep. In deep sleep, 'I' is withdrawn into the self. Everyone enjoys peace, tranquility, happiness of dreamless deep sleep. The moment 'I' wake up, host of other thoughts wake up - I am this... I am that ... I have to achieve this... I am a man, a woman, ... I am a father... I am a failure... so on and so forth. According to Ramana Maharshi like all other thoughts 'I' also is a thought. This is the 'Mother Thought' which brings up hosts of other children 'Thoughts'. The 'I' itself - the very thought of 'i' is absent in deep sleep. That is the true state which everyone experiences in the sleep, unaware. Transcending the 'I' thought with full awareness is self realization i.e. stay in one's own true state. For this you have to go inside not outside.

Here, I am reminded of Mullah Nazruddin's tale. Mullah was searching vigorously on a road in broad day light. His friend who was passing through asked him as to what had happened. Mullah said that he lost a golden pin. The friend joined Mullah in the search. After a while, friend asked Mullah as where he lost it. Mullah said he lost it in his bed room. His friend laughed and said, "Are you a fool if you lost it in your bed room, why are you searching

on the road". Mullah answered seriously - 'That room is totally dark. There is light here". We are all Mullah's brothers. If we close eyes, we see darkness inside. There is light outside. Wealth, women, name, fame all are dazzling and enticing us to find happiness. We all have chosen the hard way of learning, but we may waste a few life times in searching for eternal unending happiness. From cradle to the grave all are searching for eternal happiness. As an infant in - mother's lap, as a child in playthings including friends, as youth in studies and sports, as men in women and children, as old men in grand children and finally in death - last wish of almost all is to die peacefully without becoming a burden to oneself and others. Thus, all along it is a search for one thing i.e. happiness, unlimited and unending.

(To be continued)

THE DREAD OF OLD AGE

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Victor Hugo is nearer truth when he said, "The misery of a child is interesting to a mother. The misery of a young man is interesting to a young woman. The misery of an old man is interesting to nobody." Amongst the predominant concerns of society today is helping the elderly to confront the reality of lonely living. Ubiquitous in nature, it encompasses one and all including the rich and the poor, the rural and urban, the sick and the disabled as well as the more healthy. As life evolves, even those in their peak career or middle age and in good health can easily foresee the time when they will be obliged to sidestep the escalator into this reality.

A crucial demographic fact has come to the fore in recent years and over the course of the 20th century, people began to age more slowly as the rates of mortality and morbidity declined due to advancement in medical science. Old people lived longer and stayed healthy. It has been reported in a journal that in many ageing societies like Germany, Italy and Japan, the people above 65 years outnumbered the youngsters under 15 creating a frightening imbalance. A saddening concomitant of this situation is the marginalisation of the aged in most societies including the developed ones for no fault of theirs.

Like the other developed or rapidly developing countries, India too, is experiencing an explosion in the numbers of the aged people. According to a recent U.N.

Report, there are 75 million old people in India above 60 years of age and they are expected to double by 2020. Out of them 40 percent live below poverty line. 55 percent of women are widows and over 60 percent of them without any support. 75 percent of them are illiterate and have to depend on physical labour even during their last days. By 2025, the number of those over 80 is likely to go up to 177 million.

It is an irony that no one seemed to bat an eyelid over this explosive issue and it is time the society sensitized itself to the problems of the old and elderly and help them lead a life of dignity and independence. In the West, the care system for the aged is more refined because of longer innings of material progress. Isolating the aged has moved in step with the pace of tangible progress there. Familial relationships are weak and youngsters break out early and the elders are reconciled to the idea of independent living without any expectation from the young.

As against this, situation in India is more complicated with the nearly extinct joint family system and dependence of elder citizens on children who are fleeing to the U.S. West Asia or Australia in search of greener pastures, with the result the elders fail to have adequate societal support. A stage has come when the aged are deserted by the children and dumped in the cages of old age homes which are often worse than a sty where overcrowding and grunts are common. Barring a few, many homes across the country have not fared well either in the matter of providing physical comfort or medical care to the aged who still struggle to come to terms with loneliness. Voluntary organisations of charitable nature should come forward and raise financial resources and set up old age homes in large numbers at the local, regional, state and national level with a strong commitment to their welfare keeping at a distance the profit motive and fly-by-night operations. It has to be realised that the majority of the elderly are poor and the widows are the poorest. Hence plans for economic support in the form of employment have to be devised so that their residual strength can be harnessed and they can fend for themselves as a team rather than fight the loneliness individually. It is often commented rather uncharitably by the youngsters that the elderly are deadwood forgetting for the moment such deadwood can be found even among the young and energetic in any office and but for whose caring and caressing they would not have been what they are today. It is also distressing to

note that the government often raises a hue and cry over the mounting pension bill of the retired employees and it has even gone to the extent of contemplating to scrap the pension scheme. It may be good economics but bad ethics. This is certainly not the way to honour our elder citizens who have contributed their mite in our nation building. Some think-tanks have opined that the aged would be happy if they are on their own. This sounds well in today's materialistic world, when there is no value for love and affection. There is of late a discernible change in the attitude of the elders in this direction. But staying alone preconditions a certain attitude, a healthy bank balance and healthier physical condition. The feasibility appears to be less and it sounds somewhat over optimistic. The need of the hour is the introduction of a sound social security system as it exists in countries like Singapore covering health, housing and financial requirements of old people. The various confusedly Criss-Crossing programmes and the old age pension scheme under which an elderly indigent gets a paltry amount after a cumbersome procedure have not yielded the desired results due to unhelpful attitude of the bureaucrats. It is encouraging to note that the Government was seized of the matter though belatedly and enunciated the National Policy on older people in 1999 and a plan of action has been prepared, but there is scepticism over its implementation.

The observance of World Elder's Day annually with pious promises would be of no avail so long as the aged people stand with their hearts in their mouths for succour. In the ultimate analysis, a strong political will on the part of the Government to frame policies and programmes of welfare for older people as part of overall development strategies and implement them in all sincerity, combined with a touch, a kind word and a loving embrace from their children in particular, and society in general, would go a long way in solving the problem.

SRI AUROBINDO - II (Aug. 15th 1872 — Dec. 5th 1950)

- Sri C. Sivasankaram

It was 1905. Partition of Bengal mooted and enacted by Lord Curzon an opinionated and vain Viceroy of India. It was the best opportune time to mobilize, unite and galvanise the nebulous political state of the country. It gave momentum in people to rise to one to bring down the mighty empire's vainglorious victory to see reason to

shelve his policy. As a result of the agitation partition was annulled, Hindu-Muslim Unity forged. India was in a ferment. To bide time was foolish. The youthful men of all walks of life came out to offer their blood and life for the cause of freedom of their mother. She is not a gross country without heart and soul. She was Bhavani and Bhavatarani. Sri Aurobindo who was in his 33rd year entered the arena wielded his powerful pen, blessed by Bhavani and unleashed a spate of articles to tone up the spirit of the young and old. His pen became the sword arm of the struggle for independence. Kannagar is a small town in the Hoogly District of West Bengal, situated on the west bank of the river Bhagirathi. It is one of the twelve epithets that holy Ganga bears. The town even though small in size produced all-time greats of the country. The fertile and cultural soil of the town was able to groom the minds of men born there as the best in Bengal, consequently in India. The forefathers of Sri Aurobindo hailed from this unique town imbued with supine spirit and nobility of the soil. Sri Raj Narayan Bose the maternal grandfather of Sri Aurobindo was an early synthesis of both East and West. He represented the highwater mark of the composite culture of the country - Vedantic, Islamic and European.

Sri Aurobindo was born around 5 am, i.e. twenty four minutes before sunrise in the house of Manmohan Ghose a friend of Dr. Krishna Dhan the father of Sri Aurobindo on the theatre road Kolkatta on August 15th, 1872 C.E. It was the blessed hour of gods or Brahma Muhurtam. He was the third son of the parents Dr. Krishna Dhan and

Swarnalata Devi. It was a date which had already been consecrated by the Mahasamadhi of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. It possessed yet another special significance. It is the date of the Assumption of Virgin Mary. It implies that the physical nature is elevated to celestial nature. The Virgin Mary refers to prakriti or Aditi. Jesus as the Divine soul took birth in man - he is the son of God as well as Son of Man. The birth took place eleven years after Dr. Rabindranath Tagore (Both Tagore and Sri Aurobindo fostered bonds of mutual regard and veneration) nine years after Swami Vivekananda's birth (The influence of Vivekananda and his master on Sri Aurobindo was telling) and twenty five years before Netaji Subhashchandra Bose. Sri Aurobindo & Bose detested to be loyal tools of British Raj. So the two managed to be disqualified for the coveted I.C.S. test. Bhagavan Sri Satyasai Baba was also born fifty four years later well right at the same hour Sri Aurobindo descended on earth. Sri Aurobindo foresaw in one of his magic excursions the advent of Satyasai on Nov. 23rd 1926. The following day satisfied as he was by Swami's advent he receded into solitude for the rest of his mortal sojourn as he felt the advent Satya Sai Baba itself had force that would put the strayed world on rails.

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