

HIMALAYAN SANTINIKETAN

FOR A SUSTAINABLE CIVILISATION

-- Jyotirmoy Goswami

The whole world today is faced with an unprecedented spurt of crises and conflicts --- in spite of some attempts here and there for coordination and dialogue which still create sporadic hopes for a new kind of world as well as some sort of national, regional and local order. Right now, before things get much worse and ultimately devolve all hopes into delusion, those attempts and the processes generated by them must be made consistently stronger in order to avoid a total collapse of the planet and its people which seems not a far-off possibility.

But it's not so easy a matter to tame hatred and violence when inequality is in an accelerated mode, especially during the last couple of centuries, triggered by the ethos of competition. Ever since the Second World War this problem has been getting harder and harsher. Maybe we are on the threshold of an era, when exploitation of people and the planet has touched a peak, and aggressed and engulfed the planet and its vast majority of lives, both human and non-human, at an unprecedented rate! This exploitation of natural resources --- such as coal, oil, water and many other minerals --- in one way lured the rural people to create a large scale migration to urban areas while recklessly accumulating there a huge wealth; on the other, offered a projected threat of much larger migration caused by environmental degradations. Threats from the environmental front will, no doubt, severely add to the bitter cup of our injury caused by already existing

inequalities. And at the same time danger of spreading hatred and violence would increase at an absolute rate, which the humankind would hardly be able to pass through.

It's true that humankind has got the instinct of hatred and militancy in much greater proportion than it might have supposed to serve the need for his struggle for existence. And yet, it's also true that humankind possess love and compassion as well, and in an amount, which is abundantly surplus to the need for his bare survival! That means there are still ample hopes and huge scopes for a genuine dialogue across the society, though dialogue alone can never do everything needed for establishing peace and harmony. So what is urgently needed now, is the combination of dialogue-and-action working hand in hand.

A new as well as traditional and organic system of education can be a very good starting point of this combined initiative of doing-and -dialogue at the grassroot levels. Without plunging into a simplistic adventure of eradication of inequality in a shortcut manner, and thereby entering into another blind lane, we can go ahead connecting people in a new manner, while serving them in matters of their lives and livelihoods in a known and concrete way. That means, by providing services relating to education, health, agriculture, horticulture (where a huge possibility lies today), small scale industries, animal husbandry all of which will have a renewed organic relationship with society as well as nature.

At the time of providing any service it is to be kept in mind that any piecemeal approach would be very inadequate for the performance of any center of education or culture, which envisions a true change at the grassroot levels. There must be activities which have holistic approaches towards the main problems that engulf us at every level --- local, national and global.

What are the gravest problems? Apparently, the answer would be-- those arising from the crises in environment, agriculture and employment.

In ancient India educational institutions were developed, while maintaining such an organic relationship with the villages around. There was a symbiotic relationship between them, which provided their reciprocal security.

If we take up the instance of the University of Nalanda, we will see that it sustained brilliantly for more than a millennium until it was suddenly destroyed by outer forces, maybe coupled with its inevitable inner decay. But we cannot resist ourselves from delving deep into the mystery behind its wonderful brilliance and long period of sustenance! Wherefrom did it get its life-force? Here lies the answer --- more than two hundred villages were connected with it in the rhythm of a direct relationship, which was possible at that time.

However, today's reality of centralization doesn't approve this type of system to get consolidated again with the same flair. Now we can try for something that can function in compatibility with the existing system, at the same time, explore the vitality of the new.

Before dealing the question of how can the new be ushered in, we must take into account the crux of today's world as well as local problems. As we have stated earlier, today's world problems mostly range around environment, agriculture and employment. Amongst them we have come to know to a large extent the severity of the two of them, namely, environment and employment. But perhaps we don't know very well how these two problems got acutely enhanced following the practice of the so called scientific agriculture and the shifting of so many agro-based industries from homes to corporate houses. There awaits a huge possibility if today's agriculture can be updated and fully re-oriented with a holistic vision. We

will be amazed to see the change following the reorientation of agriculture, to sense a solution to the crises in environment and employment!

Agriculture awaits a sea-change now and is going to be the most essential part again of human adventure in the coming decades. After World War II it aimed at three-sided increase mainly. 1. Increasing arable land, 2. Increasing scopes for multi-cropping, 3. Increasing the rate of production by 2-3 times. Today all these increasements have got shattered miserably. As per the observations of a large section of scientists, arable land is going to be diminished by 40% within the next 50 years, as natural consequences of so many valid reasons. And during that time 2 billion people will be added to the existing 7 billion! Multi-cropping too, in many places, has started decreasing due to paucity of water-availability following the depletion of surface as well as ground water, prompted by its miss-use. And the rate of production has also started decreasing quite noticeably.

But strangely, there is a very cruel contradiction too! Land and water --- unutilized, underutilized and mis-utilized --- are increasing at a very high rate!

These resources can be ranging from 20 to 80 percent of total land and water of almost each and every country of this planet. And the other main asset--- countless hands --- are also left unutilized miserably!

The first green revolution happened in agricultural land, triggered by the discovery of science and technology, following which the three- faceted increase took place. That is a history now. The future of an ever-green revolution depends on the utilization of those assets--- in unutilized, underutilized and mis-utilized land and water and, of course, with so many hands, those that can make a magic and miracle !

But this evergreen revolution can never be materialized with the help of science and technology alone. That demands a complementary development of socio-cultural and spiritual technology too.

A new center of education, which will be associated with the name of no less a person than RABINDRANATH TAGORE, can fill the vacuum and foster the revolution in line with his unique institution he himself had established at Santiniketan and Sriniketan in West Bengal, India. The new institution or university must have so many works to do, so many areas to cover. But its main purpose would be to evolve a symbiotic relationship with nature and people around that can function organically.

There are so many ways of evolving such a relationship between educational institutions and the immediate people and nature around. We are not in a hurry to conclude candidly that today's institutions are giving far less than they are taking! Today they mostly take either from the government or from the students. Few world class universities or institutions earn a lot for their self-sustenance by giving consultation or providing technical support of innovative nature in global scale.

However, huge opportunities are there before all institutions who are ready to receive them for working in the field of environment, employment and agriculture. There could be several subjects of study around the management of unutilized, underutilized and mis-utilized land, hand and water, which demand massive involvement of local people. Organic or natural farming along with an inter-knitted enterprise of agro-horticulture can ensure a wider opportunity of employment for the local people and provide them all a basic safety net for a long time! Increase of horticultural production by around 3 to 4 times does have an enormous utility, no doubt, for providing poison-free and nutritious foods of varied

kinds in plenty. This new agro-horticultural development bears the potential of creating harmony in social, economic and ecological fields if it is reoriented in the light of regenerative life-style in place of the present degenerative one!

In the context of globalization of market and islandisation of individuals an educational institution can do a lot today! In addition to imparting every aspect of modern demand, an educational center of a special kind can very much get directly connected to the local community. Mostly, in alleviating world's most conspicuous crisis in environment, employment and agriculture in course of earning their self-sustenance from this venture, at least partially. There must be a debate as to how the center can undertake such an adventure, must-be-done-but-hard-to-practice, is a matter to be worked out in the process of an on-going, awakened research. But it has to be tried. Connected. Both globally and locally. Like trees for extracting energy from the limitless sky and priceless soil. For, as Tagore whispers, "Emancipation from the bondage of soil is not freedom for the tree ". We can recall his saying "Our educational institutions are like parasites hanging from exotic trees".

So now, for moving the research forward, we can get a flood of signals from the writings of Tagore and other co-thinkers of the world as well and the practice he himself had made in Santiniketan more than a hundred years ago (In spite of, the probable allegation that Santiniketan has become a fossil of her living soul, one can argue that the DNA of Santiniketan is still there everywhere for the coming generations to take it and resurrect her soul from so called futility.)! Santiniketan has taught us how to nurse nature and how to nourish the soil and soul at one go!

This ailing planet, which is yelling for the future of all her offsprings, desperately needs that nursing, and the healing touch today.