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Traditional Wisdom of our society and the modern context

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Dear all I²ITians,

Introduction:—

The sociopolitical and psychocultural structure of a society is shaped, if not governed, by the technoeconomic forces. The progress of the human society from the fragile bodied food gatherers and scavengers to the creators (or destroyers) of the environment can be traced over four stages, through the changes in the technoeconomic factors. These stages are,

- (a) man within nature,
- (b) man with nature,
- (c) man against nature and
- (d) nature against man.

(a) Man within nature was a prehistoric stage, when the human herds were subsisting only on nature's bounty like most other animals. However, every other animal was provided with one or another type of a skill, which the human species lacked, e.g. long and sharp fangs and nails of the carnivores, the physical strength of a horse or the huge body of an elephant and gorilla. The food shortage compelled each individual in a herd to work all through the day and that provided, at the most, a subsistence level of living.

Karl Marx calls this stage as, ‘Primitive Communism’ because, there was no surplus and so no concept of private ownership.

(b) Man with nature By the time, man learnt the art of agriculture and animal husbandry, there was a quantum change in the lifestyle. A durable type of food (viz. grains), a surplus over the daily need and a technology (of agriculture) that compelled the herds to stay at one place, were the factors responsible for the change. The surplus food permitted division of labour and specialisation. The art of consciously building and managing organisations, encouraged further division of labour and specialisation.

This stage lasted the longest in the human history, approximately from 7000 BC to the end of the 18th century AD. Though agriculture was certainly an interference with environment, nature could take it in its strides.

(c) Man against nature The rise of the mercantilist society in Europe towards the close of the 14th century, developed what is referred to as the sensate attitude. The respect and a sense of obligation about nature, that existed in the agrobased economies of the earlier period was gradually replaced by the sense of ownership of nature, which was looked upon as a RESOURCE, to be exploited for obtaining goods and services for an ever increasing standards of living for those privileged people, who possessed the required purchasing power.

The ‘ownership complex’ under the sensate attitude was further strengthened by the Industrial Revolution of 1750. The mechanised production process further reduced the human dependence on nature. Second, the increased production demanded an ever expanding market and additional sources of raw materials and energy. This led to the colonisation of the Asian, African countries and occupation of the New World by the growing capitalist powers. Hence this stage is referred to as Man against nature.

(d) Nature against man This is the stage in which we are living today. The capacities of nature to generate energy and materials were not only overused for a fast industrialisation and the resulting consumerism, but nature’s ageold processes of cyclical regeneration of resources were also

disrupted by the human interference. The bad effects of these are now experienced by us. The air, water and land pollution, the Green House Effect, the resultant Global Warming, the hole in the Ozone layer exposing us to the carcinogenic U.V. radiation from the Sun, overurbanisation causing the problem of urban waste management, a loss of quality of life in spite of an ever increasing average standard of living, an ever widening gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have nots’, leading to the problems of Naxal and other terrorist movements etc.

As Swami Chinmayananda puts it “The tragedy of the human society today is the decreasing happiness in the face of increasing comforts.”

A common belief nurtured by the majority of the ‘enlightened’ population in our country is that the solution to these problems must also come from the West, wherefrom these problems have come.

How far is this an operationally meaningful expectation?

Let us open an E-dialogue on this issue from today.

Please send your opinions and arguments on narendras@isquareit.ac.in

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