

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE
COMMUNICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND RELATIONSHIPS

S. C. MALIK

A pre-requisite for international understanding for human unity, or any other matter, especially in the context of the crisis which human civilization faces, is that ideas, new or old, are authentically communicated between individuals and between different cultural categories. True understanding implies that genuine ways of interpersonal and intercultural communication is evolved. For this radical shift to take place, an enquiry into the notions of the 'self and the 'other' becomes imperative, if human 'development' and 'progress' as a whole is to take place.

Human civilization today is confronted with a series of crisis, the predominant one being a psycho-spiritual one. Clearly, the inward movement is lagging behind the outward one. This has also caused a crisis of identity, for Man is unable to distinguish, for instance, between 'who I think I am' and 'who I am'. Anthropocentric world views are dominating many cosmo-centric world views. There are many outmoded assumptions which have become an intrinsic part of contemporary man's thought processes. There is a big gap between what one says and one does. The conceptual models are fragmentary in their approach to reality, so that they continue to cause destruction of both man and nature. For example, the notion of linear time (linear thinking), binary systems: you vs. me, East vs. West, subjectivity vs. objectivity, domination vs. subordination, Newtonian-Cartesian world views, and so on. This is why today a paradigmatic shift is urgently required in human consciousness.

This 180-degree turnabout has to take place in the psyche of humankind, not merely in the external world. Thought on its own, without contemplation, cannot ever bring about any holistic perception, howsoever theoretically sound may be the goal of unity, peace and harmony for the globe. An awareness of the many forms of crucial cultural conditioning is the first step for awakening the long dormant areas of the brain. There have been a few individuals in the history of humankind who have functioned fully as Beings. It is their presence that has touched the innermost psyche of Universal Man, and truly brought about transformations. The reference is to those moments, aesthetic or otherwise, which each one of us has experienced sometimes in our lives. These states of 'knowing' or 'understanding' come from the impersonal whole mind without effort, and may be distinguished from automatic reactive normal social behaviour by the intensity of consciousness involved in it. This Knowing is Being, and this is the source of true communication.

Thus the importance of self-knowledge is very evident since 'an unexamined life is not worth living'. At this first stage, as a statement of enquiry, one may raise some basic questions, namely 'in what way do we know what we know, given our conditioning?' It needs to be emphasized that answers have to be found experientially by each one of us in our daily life.

To start with, for purposes of analysis, one may say that reality is known through perceptual, conceptual and metaphysical levels, and these differ from one culture to the other. Furthermore, at the psychological level, knowing and communication is operational at three levels. Simply stated, these are:

(i) Images, symbols, concepts, language analysis; in short, thought processes; (ii) Emotions, feelings, intuition; in short, experiencing; and (iii) Insight, attention, awareness, consciousness; in short, Beingness, or Presence.

In a holistic functioning, all three levels work together. However, in conditioned living, one is governed largely by the first level, without even being aware of it so that all ideas of transformations are contained within that box. Even the experiencing of emotions and feelings are often a repetition in

terms of the stimulus-response framework, within the boundaries of the ego, which seeks security within the 'survival' paradigm. This constant seeking of certainty is itself living in insecurity, it is to live life unconsciously, like frogs in a well. This avoidance of the uncomfortable areas creates isolation, since whatever one resists, that persists, thereby preventing both true communication (communion) and participation in life. This absence of 'aliveness' causes acute psychological insecurity. In order to overcome that, there is a constant need, a restlessness to seek out something 'more and better', to achieve, to become. 'Becoming' gains the upper hand over 'Being'.

This is the normal socio-psychological behaviour governing most of the humankind. Each person as an image is made of a multitude of variables and reactions. This is what goes into the making of the 'me' and its extensions. Psychologically, the modern world consists largely of insecure persons who endlessly project objectives, goals and utopias for the future, both individually and collectively. Since all these reactions arise out of past memories, all ideas of improvement in the future are actually extensions of the past. The future is the past. Hence, all goals in this linear thinking for a better world are mere repetitions appearing in different garbs. The more one tries to change, the more it remains the same.

In this endless 'non-living' one forgets, which as children one has known perhaps, that joyful experiencing, which arises from primordial consciousness. Inherently, even in material pursuits and consumerism, one is seeking unconsciously, negatively those forgotten moments. In these timeless moments, there is no distinction between the experiencer and the experience. There is only experiencing moment to moment in the NOW. It is living in the moment, not for the moment, beyond duality. It is being in the world, and not of it. The reference is to those creative processes, wherein the paths keep clearing up effortlessly, without any motivations or hankering after results. In fact, in the NOW, there is no person (Latin: persona, meaning mask) 'in here' or 'out there'. This is when effective communication and feeling truly being related comes into existence. Today, man's psyche is increasingly being bombarded with information technology, all kinds of messages, thoughts are being generated that are far removed from any experiential reality. Does this techno-economic 'development' and 'progress' really indicate any improvement in the quality of life of a human being? On the other hand, to illustrate, until recently the transmission of culture (often within many oral means) in India was taking place within a total inter-related communication system, arising from indigenous concepts and world views. Today, we have become second-hand human beings, becoming merely objects, and passive recipients either from mass media or any other source.

True communication essentially is a multi-layered way of the transmission of human expression in totality, involving all the senses. Communication arising from such total experience implies a full respect for all human qualities and sensibilities. This is what allows one to establish warmth and rapport, sympathy and empathy (which implies responsibility). The one-sided 'objective' approach, on the other hand, has atomized the phenomenal world, depriving humankind of the great things of beauty, the capacity for compassion and love. This is why there is a tremendous increase of loneliness, estrangement, alienation and violence, which is seen so obviously. Wholeness, on the other hand, means that all parts belong together, that they partake in each other so that participation arises out of a feeling of relatedness, a feeling of inter-connectedness. In true communication and relatedness, each one of us participates in the totality. Bearing the above in mind, communication as participation in life requires that some of the following points may be considered as crucial indicators: i) Empathy. ii) Communion with the other. iii) Learning to use the other's language, metaphorically or literally. iv) The ability to penetrate from within, 'indwelling' in the other and v) Learning the ability to transform one's consciousness so that it becomes a part of the consciousness of the 'other'.

In this context, some of the ongoing questions that may be kept in mind are as follows: i) How to evolve a dialogue and to maintain it? ii) How to be sensitive to that which the other embodies? iii) How to be aware of one's own sensitivities which need to evolve in order to establish rapport, within inter-

subjective terms? iv) How does one make a transition from 'objective' consciousness to compassionate consciousness?

This perspective has wide human implications for the predicament within which humankind is caught up. The rational and the intuitive and the compassionate approach are not antithetical to each other. They are aspects of each other. The answers to the above issues and questions are applicable at many levels and situations, and are to be found within each and every appropriate specific context. There are no fixed formulae in this approach. The aim is not only to acquire objective information, but also to heal, to maintain well-being, and to enhance life, to make it more vibrant and radiant. Participatory thinking and communication is co-creative, it imposes no straitjackets on another. Communication coming from this 'lived experience' and participation is the starting-point of a dialogue between the 'self' and the 'other', which is also the route to 'true knowledge'. Understanding the other, is not merely exchange of information, it is a learning process for all concerned. The emphasis is thus on communication which has to be seen in terms of integral listening, of the silence that forms the background of true human communication.

Today, modern man is lost in the use of mere expressive and excessive language, an internal and external chatter, merely hearing rather than listening; unlike in many earlier societies where the power of the unsaid was of considerable importance. This silent listening unifies all the elements of the Cosmos, within a sacredness, which gives the 'centredness', a rootedness that contains the 'other'. An individual can only speak if one is listened to. This saying without listening has spread so widely that it constitutes a form of domination and control ignoring all other cultural lifestyles. To experience the 'Thou as truly Thou' implies an openness that shows concern spontaneously for everyone and everything around. Without this there is no genuine communication and human relationship, since there is no belonging together.

* Formerly Senior UGC Professor, S. C. Malik's article is based on the lecture he delivered at the Institute in February 2006.