

## THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION INSTITUTE OF CULTURE

### GLOBAL REALITIES AND RADICAL SPIRITUALITY

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'The earth is one, but the world is divided.' Countries of the world are divided into rich and poor, developed and developing, advanced and backward, modern and traditional, south and north, first world (Western Europe, USA and the Pacific-the capitalist), second world (the Eastern Europe-the socialist) and third world (Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia except Japan-the developing) and so on. International organizations and institutions-UN, IMF, WB, and WTO-were founded to heal the wounds of division. But the sad story is that they themselves are divided and have become mouthpieces of powerful countries.

While the developed countries have, according to purchasing power parity (PPP), more than \$ 25,000 as GDP / PC, the developing ones have around \$ 2,500 (just one-tenth of the rich countries). World economies are divided according to 2003 GNI per capita, calculated using the World Bank Atlas method, as low income: \$765 or less; lower middle income: \$766-\$3,035; upper middle income: \$3,036-\$9,385; and high income: \$9,386 or more. Why is it that rich countries are always rich and poor ones remain always poor? What are the factors for such realities?

India: With a total population of 1.027 billion persons, which is 16 per cent of the world's population; with 1/3 of world's poor; 27.1 per cent below the poverty line; with a per capita income of US\$ 2,500, which is 1/13 of the developed countries; ranking 124th in the human development

index, India faces, besides economic and political instability, ethnic and communal outbursts which have proved fatal to its development. According to Transparency International (TI) survey (2002)<sup>1</sup>, India stands out as one among the 30 most corrupt countries in the world. TI gives India an integrity score of meagre 2.7 out of clean 10. TI has also found out that Indians pay a whopping Rs. 267 billion in bribes annually with the health sector perceived to be the most corrupt with people being made to pay for what they are entitled to.

Equally surprising is education at the number two position. Corruption has corroded the two key areas of development. Health and education are the two sectors, which are, and ought to be, the undisputed engines of higher growth. There are no two opinions on the liberal allocations made in Plan after Plan for these vital sectors. But if the money is misspent, it is a national loss. It slows down progress and harms collective well-being.

Corruption in governance is the root cause of many evils today resulting in slow development. It brings down the quality of governance. A survey of seven government departments conducted in 2002 in five metros<sup>2</sup> in India rated Delhi's Customs and Excise Department, scoring 8.6 on a scale of 10, the most corrupt.<sup>3</sup> As Frederick Keith Ross has said, 'Corruption is a sin; every government denounces it and every government practices it.'

Politicians, bureaucrats and governments in India are involved in scams and scandals. 1990s has been a decade of scams<sup>4</sup>-the Bofors, the Bank Securities scam, the Hawala scam, the Animal Husbandry scam, the Sugar scam, Telecom scam, Fertilizer import scam, PSE disinvestment scam, etc. Indian governments, Centre and States, are full of scandals and corruption charges involving those who occupy top political positions. Corruption manifests itself in many forms: at the highest political level as horse-trading of MLAs and MPs; at the fiscal level in the form of evading taxes; at the corporate level in terms of financing elections by black money and so on.

As Ruddar Datt puts it,<sup>5</sup> 'A strong feeling has grown in Indian political life that corruption has become a way of life. In case, you are caught taking a bribe, you can get rid of the crime by paying a bribe'.

Bribe has become an incentive these days, which increases work efficiency in public offices. It is disturbing to note that corruption has brought India among the lowest in the list of countries of the world in the matter of prevalence of corrupt activities. Today government is being gradually transformed into a company / a business enterprise. Can governance become a business? Indian political system as well as the judicial system needs reforms.

70 per cent of India's population lives in villages. It is multireligious, multicultural and multilinguistic. It is known to be a cradle of all religions. India has had a long tradition of religious tolerance. It professes secularism as per its Constitution. Secularism means an attitude of equal respect for all religions. Unlike in the West, where secularism came mainly out of the conflict between the Church and the State, secularism<sup>6</sup> in

India was conceived as a system, which sustained religious and cultural pluralism. Secularism as understood in Indian politics today means anti-communalism.

Take an Indian village; people of different religions and castes have lived together for centuries in harmony and peace. But, of late, particularly since independence, communal clashes are common, costing hundreds of human lives and huge destruction of wealth and property. Godhra Massacre of February 2002 in Gujarat where nearly 2000 people, mostly Muslims including women and children, were murdered is a recent case in this regard.<sup>7</sup> While religious pluralism is strength on the one hand, it is also a bane to India's development. The two major religions namely Hinduism and Islam are often at war with each other. Frequent communal clashes keep the environment disturbed with fear and suspicion and reduce the degree of incentives to invest and potential for productive activity. Communal violence is a major hurdle to India's progress.

Ethics and values: Business schools teach a lot of things-managerial economics, accounting, marketing, and retailing, among others. Nowadays, they are also trying to instill something they should have been doing all along-plain old-fashioned trust, honesty and integrity. They call it 'ethics,' and a few of them call it 'business ethics' or 'development ethics' (as if that was something different from 'regular' ethics), but they are all trying to counteract the loss of trust and truthfulness that has been created by the massive business frauds of the last few years.

Ethics is concerned with how a moral person should behave. It refers to principles that define behaviour as right and wrong. Such principles do not always dictate a single 'moral' course of action. but provide a means of evaluating and deciding among competing options.<sup>8</sup> Values are the inner judgments that determine how a person is and behaves. We translate values into principles so that they can guide and motivate moral and ethical conduct. Values are different from ethics. For example, trustworthiness, truthfulness, honesty, integrity are values. The terms 'ethics' and 'values' are not interchangeable. Ethics flow from values and not vice versa.

Trust, writes Piotr Sztompka,<sup>9</sup> may be defined as 'a bet on the future contingent actions of others'. When we decide to trust an individual or an institution, we are not completely certain what is going to happen, that is, if the person or institution is going to live up to our trust and in fact prove trustworthy. That is why we differentiate between 'blind faith' and trust. Even if we do not sit down and perform a probability analysis of the risks that our trust will be abused every time we decide to trust someone, there is usually an element, however small, of uncertainty. If we were entirely sure that someone was trustworthy, we would have no need for a word like confidence, that is, advance belief. Confidence expresses what we believe in advance in something, but do not know for certain. Trust involves strength, frequency, and reciprocity of successful repeated interaction.

Trust and honesty are key factors. A prerequisite of trust is honesty. As Jim Clemmer<sup>10</sup> explains, honesty is a clear conscience 'before myself and before my fellow human beings.' Honesty is the awareness of what is right and appropriate in one's role, one's behavior, and one's relationship. With honesty, there is no hypocrisy or artificiality, which creates confusion and mistrust in the minds and lives of others. Honesty makes for a life of integrity because the inner and outer selves are a mirror

Image.

Honesty is to speak that which is thought and to do that which is spoken. There are no contradictions or discrepancies in thoughts, words, or actions. Such integration provides clarity and example to others. To have one form internally and another form externally creates barriers and can cause damage, since one would neither be able to come close to anyone else, nor would others want to be close. Some think, 'I am honest, but no one understands me.' That is not honesty. Honesty is as distinct as a flawless diamond, which can never remain hidden. The worth is visible in one's actions.

Honesty and integrity are motherhood leadership phrases. And they should be. They are fundamental to leadership. Honesty and integrity produce trust, which produces high levels of confidence. High confidence encourages people to dream and to reach for new horizons. High confidence fosters risk-taking. Risk-taking and initiative are fundamental to organizational change and improvement. Our ability to lead others is directly related to our ability to forge strong relationships. Strong relationships are dependent upon trust. Trust provides the glue.

Leadership quality is directly related to relationship with people. Strong relationships are dependent on values-trust, truthfulness and honesty. Building trust and being truthful is essential for strong relationships and to the success of organizations. Unfortunately, values are not always present. Many studies show that mistrust of management and low morale are significant factors in the widening 'we-they' gap between employers and employees. In organizations where there are unethical business practices, cynicism runs rampant and employees feel an ever-diminishing commitment to their organization.

11 This situation will never change if there are no strong and trustworthy leadership at all levels. Max Weber's famous theory about capitalism posits that religion affects the economy by influencing certain individual traits. These traits, in turn, may make people more or less economically productive. Weber stressed the Protestant ethic that honesty, ethics and other kind of values influence individuals who influence the economy. We cannot deny the role of religion or values preached by religion in economic development.

All people have a right to participate in the economic, political, and cultural life of society. It is a fundamental demand of justice and a requirement for human dignity that all people be assured a minimum level of participation in the community. It is wrong for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society.

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other cross national, racial, economic and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. Authentic development must be fully human and integrated development. It must respect and promote personal, social, economic, and political rights, including the rights of nations and of peoples. It must avoid the extremes of underdevelopment on the one hand, and 'super-development' on the other. Accumulating material goods and technical resources will be unsatisfactory and debasing if there is no respect for the moral, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the person.

Sacred, yet deprived: Asia, though economically developing, is steeped in a sense of the sacred. We sense a cosmic worldview to life with rich cultural diversity expressed in art, architecture, music, and the rich classical and folk traditions. But modern media, IT and globalization-liberalization forces are posing a threat to the much-desired Asian development. The glaring reality of the vast multitude of poor, the varied deprivation and dehumanization, rampant corruption and injustice and the inevitable exclusion of the displaced, untouchables, women, indigenous and migrant communities confront Asia. The exploitation of our eco-systems further aggravates the plight of the poor.

12 Where there is absence of trust, honesty and respect for fellow human beings, there is greater degree of corruption. According to a review of Eric Chetwynd, Frances Chetwynd and Bertram Spector

13, corruption in the public sector-the misuse of public office for private gain-is often viewed as exacerbating conditions of poverty (low income, poor health and education status, vulnerability to shocks and other characteristics) in countries already struggling with the strains of economic growth and democratic transition. Alternatively, countries experiencing chronic poverty are seen as natural breeding grounds for systemic corruption due to social and income inequalities and perverse economic incentives. No system can perform in an atmosphere of mistrust and dishonesty.

Honesty and ethical behaviour are not just goods relevant to Sunday morning and the hereafter, they are critical to our economic well-being. We have become, to a great extent, materialistic and consumeristic. We give importance to 'having' and not 'being'. In being, we grow together, but in having, we perish together. We increasingly are losing our understanding of just what it means to act fairly and honestly. To be sure, we have a multitude of laws on the books that say, in essence, 'Thou shalt not lie.' However, the very number and complexity of these laws, applied in different ways to almost every aspect of economic life, have blurred the basic point: Lies are evil. The very complexity of our laws has encouraged many professionals and businesspeople to find ways of conducting business that arguably fit within the letter of the law while avoiding its true intent. We have become so tolerant of half-truths, hair-splitting definitions, and the notion that truth is 'subjective' that we have lost our ability to enforce basic honesty and truthfulness, even where it is crucial to our economic well-being.

As trust and honesty-important elements of social capital-decline, vulnerability of the poor increases as their economic productivity is affected. When people perceive that the social system is untrustworthy and inequitable, their incentive to engage in productive economic activities declines. Anti-corruption programmes that are formulated to address issues of economic growth, income distribution, governance capacity, government services in health and education, and public trust in government are likely to not only reduce corruption, but improve development as well.

It is time we stopped talking and discussing about trust and ethics, and start living it in our lives to bring changes in our organizations and companies. Our life and business depend very much on personal relationships, which are at the core of knowledge management. Trust and honesty are at the heart of the success of these relationships. The relationship between values and economic development though indirect is complimentary. An environment of trust and honesty creates a conducive climate for investment and productive activities. Higher the degree of trust and honesty, which results in strong human bond, smoother and higher will be the process and level of development.

The present political process requires purification so that political will is strengthened to take necessary action against forces that generate black money, and sow the seeds of division, casteism, hatred and communal violence. There is a need for transparency at all levels. India's legal and judicial systems are highly sophisticated and well developed. Despite that, it has not kept pace with the changing needs arising from increasing population, increase in number of laws, increase in industrial activities and other changes resulting in inordinate delays in disposal of cases. The present judicial system does not render speedy justice to people. A comprehensive review of the system is required.

Democracy is a communications-intensive mode of governance in which individuals play a more direct role through 'the power of citizen-to-citizen communications' which benefits both themselves and their community. A successful society is one that gives opportunities to its citizens and promotes its capacities in equality so that citizens think freely, work, grow and develop. The contentment of citizens is closely linked to the level of political and social empowerment they have. Where citizens control the agenda, stability and contentment is enhanced.<sup>14</sup> Even though we have made some progress, government system and administrative functioning have many weaknesses and inadequacies which are proving quite a handicap in providing satisfactory delivery of services to people.

Governance system at various levels must improve. What we urgently require are accountability, transparency and an environment of trust at all levels. Governments should introduce measures for making governance more effective and hassle-free. In order for globalization to bear a 'human face', we need to foster a major democratic participation not only at the local level but also at world level, in international institutions and multilateral organizations. We want a better world, a more peaceful world. It cannot be based on hegemony, in the balance of powers or in persuasion, but it has to be based on dialogue and cooperation, human dignity and justice.

Global spirituality: There is an urgent need for a global spirituality that considers persons as subjects and not objects of history. A spirituality that considers men and women as sacred, unique, irreplaceable and irreducible human beings, free by nature and called to transcendence. A spirituality that is human and acceptable to all religions. It should recognize the cultural diversity, the uniqueness of national and local cultures and heritage. Steeped in the sense of the sacred, it should take a holistic approach to life that life is sacred and that all beings journey towards the cosmic unity. Spirituality plays a major role in building human communities based on peace and harmony.

Spirituality liberates and empowers through a sense of shared purpose. Such a sense of purpose is a pre-requisite for a national unity and social cohesion. To lack a shared sense of purpose is to invite drift and division. Spirituality, with its regenerating power, holds the promise of a new beginning.

Optimization of the wholeness of humanity with a special focus on human development and well-being is the quintessential spiritual purpose.<sup>15</sup> It is spirituality that sustains development in society. It is the soul of all human actions. It is a powerful tool, which could bring religions together to fight against the dangers of globalization: materialism, egocentrism, consumerism, and destruction of the environment and the crises of family and neighbourhood ties. Our efforts to correct the ill effects of neo-liberalism and globalization depend on spirituality that gives us inner strength. In the absence of such spirituality, development becomes a mere material advancement based on greed and avarice. Earth is one. And all of us have a vocation to maintain this cosmic unity.

'To be fully human is to be divine'<sup>16</sup>

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## Notes and References

- 1 A survey conducted by ORG-Marg for a non-government organization called the Transparency International India, 'Corrupting Health and Education', The Tribune, 19 December 2002, Chandigarh, India.
- 2 Bangalore and Hyderabad are the fourth and fifth metros. Bangalore was taken as the fifth metro in the survey.
- 3 Manorama Year Book 2003, p. 547.
- 4 Rathi Mahendar, 'Major Economic Scams in India', [www.apmaheshwari.com](http://www.apmaheshwari.com).
- 5 Datt Ruddar, Economic Reforms in India, p. 304.
- 6 Mahatma Gandhi had once said, 'I swear by my religion, I will die for it. But it is my personal affair. The State has nothing to do with it. The State would look after your secular welfare, health, communications, foreign relations, currency and so on, but not your or my religion. That is everybody's personal concern!'
- 7 Chenoy Mitra Kamal and others, 'Genocide in Gujarat', Report by SAHMAT Fact-finding Team to Ahmedabad, March 2002, [www.countercurrents.org](http://www.countercurrents.org).
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15 Thampu Valsan, 'A Note on Spirituality', You Can Change the World, Volume 3, No. 3, March 2005, FUREC, Spirituality and Religion.

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