

The Bahudha Approach¹

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Abstract

The Bahudha approach is both a celebration of diversity and an attitude of mind that respects another person's point of view. Bahudha suggests an eternal reality or continuum, a dialogue of harmony, and peaceful living in society. There are enormous challenges in removing poverty and building an equitable social order. Fear of violence, terrorism, and the revival of the balance of power philosophy that caused conflicts and wars in the past, persist. Viciousness, duplicity and lack of trust can only be addressed through a dialogic approach and by cultivating an attitude of mind that embraces both listening and recognition of truths other than one's own. In our current global society, it is no longer possible to lead an isolated life. People of different faiths and beliefs live together. It is, therefore, necessary to understand each other's needs, aspirations, faiths, and belief practices. We have to learn to live together in concord in spite of traditional differences of religion, civilisation, nationality, class, and race.

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I. Introduction

Respected Chairperson, Prof. Aman Agarwal, Distinguished Scholars, and Friends, I have been requested to speak on the theme, "The Bahudha Approach: Peace, Prosperity, and Growth."

I have written two books on this subject, namely, "Bahudha and the post 9/11 World" and "Geopolitics, Democracy and Peace in the 21st Century".

In Foreword to the first edition (2008) of the Book "Bahudha and the Post-9/11 World", His Holiness the Dalai Lama wrote:

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“Our world today requires us to accept the oneness of humanity. In the past, isolated communities could afford to think of one another as fundamentally separate. Some could even exist in total isolation. But nowadays, what happens in one part of the world rapidly affects people in many other places too. Within the context of our new interdependence, self-interest clearly lies in considering the interest of others.

Many of the world’s problems and conflicts arise because we have lost sight of the basic humanity that binds us all together as a human family. We tend to forget that despite the diversity of race, religion, ideology and so forth, people are equal in their basic wish for peace and happiness. However, this will not be achieved by merely talking or thinking about it, nor by waiting for someone else to do something about it. We each have to take responsibility as best we can within our own sphere of activity. As free human beings we can use our unique intelligence to try to understand our world and ourselves. But if we are prevented from using our creative potential, we are deprived of one of the basic characteristics of a human being.

Human beings naturally possess diverse temperaments and interests. Therefore, it is inevitable that different religious traditions emphasize different philosophies and modes of practice. Since the essence of our diverse religious traditions is to achieve our individual and collective benefit, it is crucial that we are active in maintaining harmony and mutual respect between them. Concerted efforts to this end will benefit not only the followers of our own faith, but will create an atmosphere of peace in society as a whole. Cultivating harmony, respect, and tolerance is something that we can each start doing in our own lives and in our own actions.

India is perhaps the one country whose civilization and culture have survived intact from their first beginnings. It is a civilization that has given rise to a long series of great teachers endowed with both human intelligence and a sense of responsibility towards the community. As a consequence different schools of thought and practice have evolved, some born here and others arriving from abroad. Because India and her people have, from ancient times, cherished a rich and sophisticated philosophy of non-violence at the core of their hearts, tolerance and pluralism have also flourished.

Today, India is self-sufficient, economically vibrant, and the world’s largest democratic country. It is a force to be reckoned with not only in Asia, but also in the world. It is a country in which we can see bahudha, which my friend and the author of this book has defined as something close to pluralism, as a living reality. Therefore, India has a very important role to play. It can be a model for other nations and peoples who are still striving to build civil societies, to institutionalize democratic values of free expression and religion, and seeking to find strength in

diversity. India can also take the lead amongst other nations by formulating principled, courageous, and imaginative policies on regional and international issues”.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama has remarked in the second edition of my book “Geopolitics, Democracy and Peace in the 21st Century” as *Stimulating and Inspiring*.

An eminent scholar, political scientist and a former Principal of Lady Shriram College, Prof. Meenakshi Gopinath, in 2020 has described my academic journey in the following words: *“Bahudha and the post-9/11 World and Geopolitics, Democracy and Peace in the 21st Century can well be retitled as Balmiki’s songs. For this indeed is a journey, a journey as edifying that began when 8 year old Balmiki Prasad Singh under the influence and tutorage of his grandfather, a Gandhian and committed educationist, the towering Hriday Narayan Singh, was admitted directly to Class VIII. Imagine to be admitted to Class VIII at the age of 8 in the Mahatma Gandhi School in his village Bihat, near Begusarai. The Principal had observed then that he was intensely engaged with the coloured globe in his office and found the lad to be of exceptional talent and genius. From then on there was no looking back. Graduating with top honours at the age of 16 in Political Science and then a Masters degree breaking all previous records to become the much awarded Indian and International civil servant and finally to retire as Governor of Sikkim. He went on in his quest to enrich and improve his knowledge to Universities of Manchester, Oxford and Cambridge and later to the USA and other parts of the world. It resonates right through the Books in educating himself about learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and above all learning to live together. It nudged him to explore domains beyond his vocation. Scholarly pursuits, intellectual and philosophical enquiry, gradually moving towards acceleration into the realm of the spiritual. The Bahudha Approach is at the core of the author’s vision.”*

It was during my tenure as Executive Director, World Bank, at Washington DC, that the catastrophe of 9/11 took place. In the aftermath of the tragedy, it became fashionable for every think tank to discuss two questions: ‘What went wrong?’ and ‘Why people hate us (Americans)?’ I happened to attend one such meeting barely ten days after the catastrophe. The gathering was impressive; I was seated almost opposite the chairperson. The guest speaker had concluded on the somber note outlining the need for building a coalition of nations against terrorism. He also spoke of the radicalization of Islam, values of religious pluralism, and the need for tolerance. The presentation over, the Chairperson asked for comments and looked at me. She said that India may have the answer in view of its heritage of pluralism and originality of mind and gave me the floor. I was not prepared. I recall having said that ‘while India may have the answer, I do not’ and went on to narrate my experiences in handling terrorism in India particularly as Home Secretary, Government of India.

I got so engrossed with the ideals of the Bahudha Approach that on my return from the United States in 2002, when I went to pay a courtesy call on

the Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, he said that would you like to go as Governor and thereafter mentioned the name of a few states. He also hinted that there was a political process. I went to call on the Congress President, Smt. Sonia Gandhi, on the following day and she also offered the Governorship. I told both of them that I am trying to write a book on the Bahudha Approach in global politics and social life and I would like to continue with that and I shall get back to you after my book is published. They both agreed. Everyone in the family as well as my friends laughed at me and said that Governorship you must have taken as book could be written any time. I pursued this and when I went to present a copy of the Book both to the Prime Minister and the Congress President, both stated almost in similar language that can you go as Governor now and after a week I was appointed as Governor of Sikkim, a post that I joined in the year 2008 and served for 5 years. In fact, no IAS Officer, after retirement, since 1947, has declined governorship to write a book.

I worked for five years on the book but faced difficulty in getting the book printed as Bahudha was not a word accepted by the Oxford University Press. It was then referred to the head office that raised their questions and then came back to me. One question which was very funny was who is the originator of the Bahudha Approach, Dr. Radhakrishnan or the author. I wrote in the margin, neither because this Bahudha Approach had origins in Rig-Veda, where it says “*एकं सद विप्रः बहुधा वदन्ति*” (Truth is one but sages have described it variously). This is something that could vary as it applies to all situations prevailing in different parts of the world, primarily to peace, society and also economical progress and growth. Today the civilization has not only history of cooperation but they also have a history of conflict and so I said that Bahudha is the answer.

Now today I am very happy to see that India has done well and has good prospect for being prosperous because its GDP is high, its growth rate is high and it is the largest or biggest country having this kind of prosperity.

II. The Bahudha Approach

The Bahudha approach is both a celebration of diversity and an attitude of mind that respects another person's point of view. I would like to call the approach I am suggesting, Bahudha. This comes from my personal attachment to an attitude that has greatly contributed to the enrichment of harmonious life in India: 'respect for another person's view of truth with hope and belief that he may be right'. This is best expressed in the Rig Vedic hymn that enjoins: 'Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudha Vadanti — The Truth is one, the learned speak of it variously.' Etymologically speaking, the word Bahudha is derived from the word bahu, and dha is suffixed to it to make it an adverb. So, what does Bahudha mean? 'Bahu' denotes many ways or parts or forms or directions. It is used to express manifoldness, much, and repeatedly. When the word is used with the root kri, it means to make

manifold or multiply. Bahudha is also used as an expression of intermittent continuity in various time frames. It is used to express frequency, as in 'time and again'. Bahudha suggests an eternal reality or continuum, a dialogue of harmony, and peaceful living in society. Pluralism could be the closest equivalent to Bahudha in the English language. Pluralism has been described in various ways in history, sociology, and politics – cultural pluralism, political pluralism, and pluralistic societies.

Pluralism has also been seen in the context of the coexistence of nation-state and ethnicity, equality and identity issues. The Bahudha approach recognises that there is a distinction between pluralistic societies and pluralism. Pluralism is an integral ingredient of democratic societies. Pluralism is imperative for both developed and developing societies. Pluralist societies are necessarily multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual societies. In such societies, there are various boundaries: racial, linguistic, religious, and at times even ideological. The Bahudha approach does not believe in annexation or transgression of boundaries or assimilation of identities and propagation of a simplistic world view. It merely facilitates dialogue and thereby promotes understanding of the collective good. The realisation of one's own identity may sustain boundaries and, at the same time, understanding of other identities may help formulate a public policy of harmony. In short, the Bahudha approach is both a celebration of diversity and an attitude of mind that respects another person's point of view. Democracy and dialogue are central to this approach. Diversity celebrates different religions, gods, goddesses and belief systems. It also promotes a feeling that the world would be a dull and over-uniform place if there was only one religion, one god, one language, one folklore and one folktale.

The movements towards democracy, religious harmony, and good education need not be viewed as separate ideals or goals; these are interrelated. Creative minds, civil society institutions, and global political architecture need to have a unity of purpose. The future of harmonious living demands sharing of a perspective that accommodates different points of view and respect for the ideals of Bahudha. Simultaneously, we have to discard the ideas like 'my god is superior to yours', 'teaching hatred can secure national integrity', 'using terrorist groups in pursuit of national goals' and 'dismantle infrastructure that breeds hatred and imparts training for terrorist acts'. Amidst all this, our task is to move collectively as human beings towards peaceful and harmonious living that demands both rationality and love. On our generation rests the responsibility to provide these elements.

There are enormous challenges in removing poverty and building an equitable social order. Fear of violence, terrorism, and the revival of the balance of power philosophy that caused conflicts and wars in the past, persist. I believe that civilisations do not clash, savagery does. Viciousness, duplicity and lack of trust can only be addressed through

a dialogic approach and by cultivating an attitude of mind that embraces both listening and recognition of truths other than one's own. In our current global society, it is no longer possible to lead an isolated life. People of different faiths and beliefs live together. It is, therefore, necessary to understand each other's needs, aspirations, faiths, and belief practices. We have to learn to live together in concord in spite of traditional differences of religion, civilisation, nationality, class, and race. To accomplish this, we have to know each other, which includes knowing each other's past. Let's learn to recognise and, as far as possible, understand the different cultural configurations in which human nature has expressed itself. Should we not make Bahudha a global creative venture — a cornerstone of liberal democracy and a plural world?

III. The Way forward

Now what role Bahudha can play. This concept can move from one part of India to other, things can move from one city of India, one village of India to outside its boundaries. These are some of the things which are a product of a realization that we cannot progress all by ourselves. As you all know, there are conflicts between India and China but still the trade is continuing and dialogue is initiated to resolve issues. The Bahudha Approach is working and it has to go on.

We must ensure that we do what we are entitled to. I have been thinking and I find that climate is another major problem for growth and this new concept that India has advocated of One Country, One Earth, One Family and One World needs to be respected in letter and spirit. We have to unite the country first in terms of all these issues and then we can focus on earth as a family “*वसु धैव कुटुम्बकम्*” (the world is one family).

Now for thousands of years, humanity lived in a harmonious relationship with nature. The wave of industrial revolution that began 250 years ago and is continuing, marked a major turning point in earth's ecology and humans' relationship with the environment. There was simultaneously also a feeling that if we have superior armed forces we can enter another country and capture their wealth and that ultimately led to a colonial order. The United States and also India and a number of the other countries became victims of that.

In the aftermath of the First World War there emerged two Blocs – the American Bloc and the Soviet Bloc. The United States which had superior quality of arms functions in a manner that they do not share all types of arms even to their allies or even close partners, This also characterized countries of the Soviet Bloc.

Many a times we saw the things going from bad to worse. Much worse is happening today, as you know Ukraine war, the Israel conflict and people are being captured and killed, countries are suffering from malnutrition, from deprivations and still we have no answer. The UN system is rather helpless. So whether it is health, whether it is climate,

whether it is disarmament, the answer is dialogue, the answer is trust but these things can't come easily. These can only come when we have the dialogue, we have trust as enunciated in Bahudha Approach. I'm giving you an example. We had the problem in the hills cutting of trees, so we started the Chipco movement. I have met their authors, we have given them awards but there was another problem and which we are facing today, these are fragile hills. We are building modern development things like underground tunnels and as a result the mountain is going down, we are opening the water ways and sending it down, the result is there are problem of scarcity of water, the problems of floods and allied matters. How to solve these problems. I believe with the Bahudha approach and that is the earth has enough to feed us, produce enough grains to feed us but what we are doing is all kinds of excessive things in forests in water systems. Fortunately generations of our agricultural scientists, our technology scientists have the talent to solve but we are unable to combine our knowledge and wisdom with our issues.

The UN system is on the brink of collapse and when you hear the Secretary General's speech, Israel said that who is the Security Council to lecture at us. This disrespect for the institutions which we have created to solve the problems, is being ill-treated. So it is in this context that science alone, politics alone are not giving the full answer. Wisdom is required and the wisdom comes with the Bahudha Approach of dialogue. The wisdom comes from your feelings that unless you don't talk to the other side or you don't talk amongst yourselves you cannot have the answer.

In utilizing our newly acquired proficiency in technology, while machines do help us save our time and energy, but the moot question is has it served promotion of common public good; has it not landed us in a mess; and we have deviated from the objectives of living in harmony with nature. Are we according priority to the means while neglecting the ends to work for building an ecological civilization that outline the ways of living in harmony with nature at local, National, Regional and Global levels needs contemplation.

Widespread industrialization, the proliferation of factories, destruction of forests for the construction of roads, blocking rivers for building massive dams and power stations and the movement of vehicles and migration of people have all caused serious disturbances in the ecosystem. The resulting climate change and global warming have to be viewed in this context.

There is a credible threat to human survival from global warming and climate change. It has the potential to damage the lives and habitats of billions of people in different parts of the world.

The ecological challenge varies from area to area. For instance, during the World Summit for Peace, Security and Human Development held at Seoul in South Korea in August 2015, I had the opportunity of interacting

with President Anote Tong of Kiribati, an island and discussed with him various aspects of climate change. He mentioned that by 2050 Kiribati is predicted to be submerged due to rising sea levels. As President Tong observed in the Inaugural Sunhak Peace Prize Ceremony at Seoul and I am quoting him:

“Climate change affects all of us in varying degrees of severity, but for my people and all those who live on atoll islands, we are at the frontline of this global calamity with the very real possibility that our islands, our livelihoods, our homes, our identity as people and as a culture may not exist within this century”.

So he said that climate change is the biggest human challenge of the 21st century before the international community. In fact the situation is so bad in that island that when people go to bed they do not know that tomorrow they may not be physically present even in this country even if they remain alive because of the precautions that they have taken. So everything is at a stake. In this background wisdom has to be in forefront. I have called it in another lecture titled “Are we on a Cliff” and we are so we must know we must combine science with wisdom so that we know how to come on the right path.

Some good things happened. Fortunately, the concern for the safety of the planet earth is catching widespread attention at various levels. At the turn of the 20th century world leaders came together at the United Nations and pledged to pursue with vigour and determination the millennium development goals for a period of 15 years from 2000 to 2015. Eight goals formed part of the program which included to ensure environmental sustainability and to develop a global partnership for development. In 2015, the world leaders assembled again at the UN and adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets calling it ‘Transforming Our World’ – the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development’. The 17 SDGs included “Climate Action”, “Life on Land,” and “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.” These goals have direct bearing upon the building of ecological civilization and how we follow the Bahudha Approach.

One is painfully aware that the UN and its agencies are not effective agents of delivery of common public goods. In fact, the present political, economic, trade and cultural bodies have shown a limited appetite for management of ecological and environmental issues. In reality, they are deeply deficient in managing their own basic charter of duty which primarily relates to security, trade, and finances. At the same time, there is no world government in sight as the nation states cannot subordinate their sovereignty. At best they can delegate certain powers to global agencies to tackle them.

The balancing of minimal government intervention with some cautionary constraints on free economic competition is the obvious goal. Achieving that balance is a complex political process.

I expect that future generation, with its basic survival needs met and with superior knowledge and resources to implement technical options, will respond to such environmental issues, for the world will have enough of technologists who will manage to deliver clean water, healthcare facilities and protect humanity from nature's wrath. The Government is fueling India's ambition not only through the banking and regulatory processes but also through technology, innovation and inclusion. The real threat to a habitable and sustainable world in the coming decades would arise from the continuing social turmoil associated with religious and ethnic differences among people. Political ambitions of national states could always push a region towards wars and conflicts. I strongly feel that strengthening of open societies where dialogue has primacy and where the spirit of understanding another's point of view is cultivated leads to a better world. Fundamentalism or that a particular view of the world must prevail is the worst of all ideologies and must be discarded. The Bahudha Approach thus becomes crucial.

IV. Summary

I believe that both institutions and individuals are important. Institutions mould character and individuals, provide resilience and flexibility to institutions. Propagation of values central to ecological civilization would require the support of farmers and the working class people as well as that of teachers and scholars, educational institutions and centres of excellence. The constructive role of media, including social media, cannot be overemphasized. This could help generate social movement. For to preserve and strengthen, hope calls upon our wisdom and our energy. Mahatma Gandhi had challenged us to "be the change we want to see in the world." Let us accept it. The need is to nurture the moral strength of men and women and their leaders to live with compassion and to spend their energies working for peace and inclusive development and respect for nature.

Friends, the Bahudha Approach, therefore, has to be viewed in a much wider context for our peace, prosperity and growth that requires dialogue, that requires respect for another persons' view point and I know that this institute of which Prof. Aman Agarwal is the presiding officer and functioning officer and scholars are promoting this not only from the pure financial angle but in its totality.

It also gives me immense pleasure and happiness to know that the Indian Institute of Finance has set up Centre for Peace and Prosperity, which I am heading as its Chair. It will be in furtherance of the ideals of the Founder of this Institute, Hon'ble Prof. (Dr.) J.D. Agarwal. It would be my privilege to continue my association with this institution to make it of global relevance. The vision of the Center is holistic and world-embracing. The Center envision a world where humanity is regarded as one universal, one family, one community and where human dignity is respected and human rights

universally upheld, where justice is the guiding principle of social order and where governance of human affairs ensures harmonious and prosperous life fully enjoyed by all. The mission is to share insights on major challenges facing the world today, inspire collective action, empower individuals, support communities and develop pioneering and fresh approaches to alleviate suffering, reduce poverty, achieve equality, protect the planet from degradation and promote peace and prosperity in a dynamically changing global village in line with the UN SDG goals and the Bahudha Approach.

I wish the institute well, and madam chairman, I need, we all need your blessings to see that scholars from all over the world belonging to various religious faiths as well as atheists facing myriad problems come here to give their ideas and suggest ways of building a better world. Humanity needs a major shift to be good to everyone. The Bahudha Approach provides that, and I hope the Bahudha Approach will be read and thought about. For such an institution alone will be an effective instrument for growth, prosperity, and peace

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