ISEC-DF WORKSHOP
ON
IDENTIFYING THE ELEMENTS OF HERITAGE OF DEVELOPMENT THINKING IN INDIA
Key note by **Sri Rajiv Malhotra,**

Infinity Foundation, based in Princeton New Jersey, has for 20 years done a number of projects relevant to Indian heritage and the Indian approach to what the West calls "development". We have published 5% of the research we have done, and now we want accelerate the output to make it public. As one example, we have a project called the *History of Indian Science and Technology* which is very important to understand. It deals with contributions to practical things, not philosophy religion literature or other abstract fields but practical things like agriculture, medicine, metallurgy, civil engineering, marine technology, etc. These are the themes on which we decided we will publish one or more volumes each. Water management is covered in three volumes for three different periods. For metallurgy we have five volumes. In total we have planned 20 volumes of the series out of which nine already exist in the marketplace.

We started in the year 2010 and till last year we did an annual conference inviting scholars and other interested persons. These were done in IIT, India International Centre, universities in Nainital, Jaipur, Pune and other places. The main purpose of this series was inspired by Joseph Needham who did such a series for China, consisting of 30 volumes on Chinese science and technology and we felt disappointed that nobody had taken up such a huge project for India. We found a paper here and there on the subject, but if you want to turn Indian contributions to science into a curriculum in universities then you need a solid corpus of reference works which are peer reviewed and academically sound. Our advisory committee has top people like MGK Menon, *Kapila Vatsayan,* and the former Director General of the Archeological Survey of India who unfortunately passed away. We decided some ground rules to prevent shoddiness, because one of the obstacles we faced was a lot of quackery, a lot of exaggeration, which can give our rigorous and legitimate pursuit a bad name. We decided early not to mix up our work with quackery.

One of our written rules is that science only accepts empirical evidence which is verifiable objectively. Pushpak Viman can't be verifiable today, because there is no crash site of Pushpak Viman or landing strip anyone can show us. There is no physical evidence and literary evidence by itself doesn't count as science. Literary evidence doesn't tell us who wrote it, where and when they wrote it, whether it was purely a frictional or imaginative idea. Was it really there or were they describing something futuristic? Similarly, nuclear bombs in Mahabharata cannot be included until someone can use a Geiger counter to prove that a certain crater is radioactive from an old nuclear explosion. If there had been a nuclear explosion, there would be a

radioactive crater as physical evidence. We did not want to be involved in any such claims that cannot be substantiated.

However, Harappan tiles can be examined physically as empirical evidence and you can calculate the temperature required to produce those kind of tiles and hence claim that temperature existed. On the steel pillar, the late professor Balasubramanian of IIT Kanpur did extensive research and was able to explain the rust proof nature of it. The steel pillar in Delhi is not the only one; he found 20 samples of similar ones across India, and showed that the rust proof quality was obtained using a novel process of nano technology. The very thin film coating that protected can be seen today. This is not based on literary evidence, but based on physical evidence. Similarly, all our volumes are based on empirical, verifiable data. The team has expertise in archeology, science, technology, history and related fields. To make it an Indian project we used only Indian authors for each volume. Each manuscript has been sent overseas for an independent peer review to wherever in the world are the top experts this field. In this systematic manner we have completed 9 volumes and another 4 or 5 are in the pipeline.

We found plenty of evidence that Indian society has not been frozen and fixed once and for all, as sometimes alleged, but has been progressive with advancements in metallurgy, Harappan tile technology and city construction from one era to the next. Medicine advanced, agriculture advanced, the ships developed into larger and more sophisticated ones century after century. Indians knew that knowledge must progress. Some people still doubt whether Indians had the concept of progress, because there is the stereotype that the Indians were otherworldly and did not have concern about this world; so westerners have to come and solve our practical problems because Indians want to escape from this world of illusion. To refute this myth is why I committed to this 20 volume series. We also done many years of research on Indian psychology to refute the claim that the discipline emerged out of the west in the late 19th century.

Our ideas of sustainable development in India have to fit in the bigger context of Indian thought and cannot be isolated from it. We are currently in the era where development has been mainly using the western models and definitions. Westerners have theorized that all this advancement is a product of what is called Protestant Ethic, a term coined by Max Weber a century ago when he wrote his thesis called Protestant ethic. That term gave credit to England and United States for modern capitalist modernity. The Protestant Ethic is a certain philosophy and worldview, with specific values without which it is claimed there could be no capitalism or free marketing economy. Modern development would not be possible, Weber argued.

Of course many Chinese argue that there is an alternative called Confucian Ethic which they are using to claim as the origin and foundation for their development. When they industrialize, the

style of management is more Confucian than Protestant, and yet they are able to make the same gadgets and compete against the West. So they are challenging the West's claim of monopoly over modernity and development by saying there is an alternative Chinese model.

The Japanese said years ago they were not compromising their civilization and remain as Japanese ever while they become very modern. Japan become an industrial giant without losing its civilization and did not adopt the Protestant Ethic or its social model. So we know that there are at least East Asian alternatives to the Protestant Ethic as basis for modernity and development. Hence, I have been asked many times whether there is any Indian alternative also.

In 2003, I gave a talk at NIAS on "*Where is India in the Encounter of Civilizations?*" basically explaining how USA, Islam and China are competing with their respective civilization models and India must fit into others' game or have its own alternatives on the table for consideration. I am thinking and writing on the theme of the place of Indian thought and civilization in the world, comparing Indian models as they apply to practical situations. My interest spans all kinds of domains from management, governance, sustainability, cognitive sciences and human development.

The primary characteristic of the Protestant Ethic on which the Western model is built is that world is seen as anthropomorphic, which means human centric. The earth was made as man's raw material for his pleasure, whereas our model says is that God manifested as the world so the cosmos is divine. The cosmos is not dead material for us to use, exploit and develop. We don't see it raw material to be turned into finished things for our need. The cosmos has its own rights. It is not that there are only human rights, but also there are ecological rights - the ecosystem has its own rights. The western idea of environmentalism is very recent. It started in the 1960's and 70's when they were afraid of running short of raw materials due to the oil crisis. People started talking about limits to growth, that growth can go on forever. Buckminster Fuller started this argument and other people took joined to make it more serious. So the western idea of sustainability and environmentalism is actually based on human selfish criteria. They are concerned about the environment because it will affect them adversely if they don't. If the water system is polluted then the fish will die and the economy will be affected. If air is polluted then health gets affected and hence also the economy. If people use too much energy then humans will run out of energy. This is not done for the sake of the environment itself.

Indians simply cannot achieve becoming like Americans in terms of material development because we have one third of their land and more than three times their population. Our population density is 10 times their, so if we want automobiles in India to be at the level of

density per 100 population as that in the US, we need so many cars that India will become a parking lot. It will not be enough to have 15 lanes and people in cars will sit and use it as an air conditioner. We have to put money into metro systems instead of big highways and car factories. We should build a water grid instead of a national highway system. A water grid will bring bottom up development boosting the half billion people who are at the lower end of the economic strata. It will create huge food production and bring economic prosperity where it's needed, helping self sufficiency and decentralization. I doubt that the automobile driven American life style is viable in India.

The second problem with this model is that it is not scalable. What is not scalable is a kind of treadmill. The bigger the problem more you dig yourself deeper to try and solve it. The third problem is that such a model is not sustainable even if it could be achieved. In other words, even if India could achieve the American style of development, imagine the amount of foreign oil India would have to import to sustain it.

I propose that Ratan Tata should package the Nano car with five years of petrol supply as part of the purchase. Wherever he gets it from ought to be his job and he must guarantee it to the consumer at a certain price to drive for 10,000 miles a year. The purchase of the car should be priced to include the energy price. Then he would be taking the risk of facing energy scarcity and he would have to buy the billions of gallons and supply to his car owners. That would be a whole different game and he will quickly start to substitute an electric car.

The waste produced in some US Cities is the responsibility of the manufacturer or retailer whose product causes it. The soft drink industry must pay per bottle sold and this is recovered when the bottle gets recycled, making it the industry's problem to ensure there is recycling. The person who is producing something with the side effect of collateral damage to the environment has to pay for that also. If you want to make the rule that anyone who is supplying anything has to pay for the energy used for its operation then it would be an incentive for energy efficiency. Then you would have comprehensive economy model that looks at the entire life cycle rather than only how make money selling something like cars without being bothered about fuels.

Americanization is a very serious problem and now the Protestant Ethic will compete against the Confucian Ethic. I am writing on comparisons of models of leadership, sustainability and governance. If you look at the Dharmic worldview, it is based on very different premises than either the Western or Chinese one. Firstly, it is not based on consumerism, the assumption that to be happy we have to buy more gadgets and external things. This is not a classical Indian idea of a good and blissful life. Instead, we have to develop the inner being from childhood, a whole

new system of education in which one's joy and bliss is less dependent on external things. This is an important point to use for an Indian model, and it involves desire management through yoga and various sadhanas.

Also consider the ashrama systems where there are different styles of life at different stages. In this model a student lives a frugal life. He is not a consumerist and is not chasing the same things as in the West. But when you're in grihastha (householder) you can have material comforts, hence it is not a life of denial. This is for a certain period of time after that one moves on to serve other people and pay back to the society. Once again, the person stops being a consumerist and downsizes his material needs. Still later, he seeks enlightenment and self-actualization, which is again not dependent on consumerism.

This whole system depends on the concept of svadharma. The cosmos is de-centralized intelligence. Svadharma is not possible in a worldview of a centralized top-down institution or a God giving some commandments with one group having a franchise to spread it all over the world. In our system the divine manifested in everyone and everyone has the potential on their own independent of any external authority or institutions. The principle of svadharma, which Gandhi used a lot, says that every human being has his unique potential which he should discover and follow. One should not copy or mimic someone else's svadharma, but follow one's own. This a very different model. So this is the starting point to formulate our alternative for the western construct of development.

The Indian ethos is based on the metaphysics of the cosmology of the universe that is premised on decentralized intelligence, whereas the west traditionally has been premised on centralized intelligence. Because the universe is seen as nothing but dead matter, the magic of molecules began to form life. The idea that animals and trees don't have souls is very different from our idea. When we say *Vasudeva Kutumbakam* we also include those animals and plants and not only human beings. The source of intelligence is radically de-centralized, very complex and there are worlds within worlds. So many contexts exists that this is bewildering and alien to the western mind which is simple - God runs the world with just 10 commandments. I don't think you can run your institutions with just 10 rules. Complexity demands empowering individuals and groups in a decentralized manner, rather than normative rules standardized for everyone. We also kept us shrutis and smitis separate; the smriti will keep on developing and it is not frozen and fixed in the book as one canon and critical edition.

What I call dharmic civilization or classic Indian civilization is not to be confused with modern Indian politics. There are people who are politically appropriating these ideas, but we can disregard them. I am researching a knowledge system and don't want to be appropriated by

this camp or that camp. Many people are obsessed with trying to figure out where an idea fits into modern politics. This restricts free thinking.

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