

A NEW RENAISSANCE

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Published by
Indian Renaissance Institute (Mumbai)
276, Telang Road,
Matunga,
Mumbai 400 019.

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Printed by Kotak Printers, 59, Dr. V. B. Gandhi Marg, Fort,
Mumbai 400 001, at Sevak Printers, 308, Shri Hanuman Ind.
Estate, G. D. Ambekar Road, Wadala, Mumbai 400 031.

Foreword

We have great pleasure in presenting this booklet to the public for a wide discussion of the subject covered by the booklet. We are grateful to Prof. Sibnarayan Ray for permitting us to publish it.

It needs to be mentioned that this booklet is one chapter of a larger book of the same name published by:

Minerva Associates (Publishers) Pvt. Ltd.
7B, Lake Place,
Calcutta 700 029.

The book, priced at Rs.190/-, is also available with:

Renaissance Publishers
15, Bankim Chatterjee Street,
(Second Floor),
Calcutta 700 073.

The publication of this booklet has been made possible by a grant from the Rationalist Foundation, Mumbai.

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As we near the end of the century, our civilization seems to be racing almost inexorably towards a global catastrophe. The enormous increase in the burning of fossil fuels for industry and transport over the last more than one hundred years and the simultaneous cutting down of trees and reduction in forest areas have been releasing into the atmosphere carbon dioxide and other noxious gases which have nearly reached a point that threatens survival, not only of the human race but also of all forms of life. The ozone layer which protects life on earth is being rapidly eroded by chloro-fluorocarbons. At the same time, not only air but also earth and water are getting fatally polluted. The ecological imbalance brought about particularly in our century by excessive human greed, intemperate consumerism, megalomaniac pursuit of power, misdirected technology and total indifference to the need for harmony between man and his natural environment, has created a situation where the present looks very bleak and the future almost a dead end.

In the meantime, horrific weapons of destruction of enormous range and power have been invented, refined and stockpiled, holding another Damocles' sword over the fate of mankind. The horror of Hiroshima gave the first experience of the deadlines of the new invention. The accident at Three Mile Island and the disaster at Chernobyl revealed the far-reaching hazards of nuclear plants. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the cold war between the two superpowers has temporarily been suspended. But the huge stockpile of nuclear weapons is already there as are the already established nuclear power plants. Despite efforts to prevent proliferation, various reports indicate that the number of countries trying to possess nuclear capability is growing, and no way has yet been found to safely dispose of stockpiles of nuclear weapons or of highly radioactive nuclear waste.

This century has also seen an unparalleled population explosion. Consequently, there has been great increase in the demands for goods and services, and a far more intensive exploitation of the earth's resources than ever before in the past. But nature's resources are not unlimited; there has to be a correspondence between what is taken away and what is put back. With rapidly rising population and increasing demand for goods and services, the depletion of resources has been taking place in this century at a much faster rate than ever before. It is getting harder to meet the growing demand,

causing widespread discontent, while exploitation of the earth's resources continues without restraint or thought of consequences, further accentuating the ecological imbalance.

Revolutionary improvements in transport, communications, technology and other means have brought different regions of the world very close to each other, but have not resulted in achieving a greater degree of social or economic equality, either between regions or within each country. On the contrary, according to the 1996 Human Development Report of the United Nations, "more than a quarter of humanity – 1,600 million people – are worse off today than they were fifteen years ago. We must face the fact that we live in a world where between 1960 and 1993, total global income increased by sixfold .. but where three-fifths of humanity still live in a prison of poverty". According to the Report, "the net worth of the 356 richest people is equal to the combined income of the poorest 45 percent of the world's population – 2,300 million people". "The world has become more economically polarised between countries and within countries ... The developing countries, with 80 percent of the world's population, account for only 20 percent of the world output. The gap in per capita annual income between the industrial and developing world tripled between 1960 and 1993, from \$5,700 to \$15,400". Within most countries, instead of a more equitable distribution of the wealth, the rich have generally grown richer while the poor have become poorer. Even in the USA, the wealthiest one percent of the population increased its share of total assets between 1975 and 1990 from 20 percent to 36 percent.

Cultural Evolution

Combined with the unabated environmental pollution, the stockpile of nuclear weaponry, unprecedented population explosion, rapid exhaustion of the world's resources and increasing disparity between the rich and the poor, we also see the swiftly accelerating erosion of those foundations of civilised living which has taken the human race millennia of sustained creative and cooperative effort to lay in different countries of the world. Values, mores, institutions, customs, human relations and principles of social justice which have been evolved through centuries of experience, experimentation and collective and individual endeavour seem to be dissolving almost everywhere – in some regions and social strata at a faster pace than in others. Appreciation of the value of truth, beauty and goodness, the distinction between right and wrong, the sense of mankind's primary need for freedom and personal integrity, friendship, love and loyalty, trust and mutual aid, the basic decencies of life, respect for privacy and high regard for creativity – all those and other various inter-related elements which nourish the psyche of the individual,

...make the cultural evolution of the human species possible and hold the destructive and self-destructive forces in men and women in check, have come to be increasingly infected by cynicism, nihilism and despair on a scale hardly ever experienced before. Families are breaking up; the young are alienated not only from the older generation but also from society as a whole, from nature and from themselves; a sense of loneliness and meaninglessness, with its myriad implications, is spreading like a contagious disease. From this situation, a frighteningly growing number of contemporary youths are seeking relief in drugs, delusion and violence. Terrorism as a way of life and necrosis of moral sensibility have become fearful features of our time.

Cretinization

While institutions and values of long standing are being "deconstructed" and the faith of mankind in its creative potentialities is being undermined both by the pressures of the situation and the growing despondency of the relatively more gifted and sensitive sections of the community, a process of global cretinization has started and is being accelerated through the highly powerful instrumentality of television, broadcasting, and other increasingly more sophisticated means of long-distance communication. Requiring huge capital investment and highly advanced technology, these instruments concentrate enormous power in the hands of those who control them. They shape and manipulate tastes, inclinations, effective demands and growing expectations of millions of people utterly defenceless against their onslaught. Discrimination is being systematically attenuated, voices of dissent suppressed, basic priorities of life subverted and replaced by artificially generated and propagated objectives, the rich cultural heritage of mankind befogged by a miasma of pop culture and 'other-oriented' gullibility. Deliberately blurring all sense of intrinsic worth, campaigns of high publicity are directed to popularize transient global fashions, each following its predecessors from nothingness to nothingness.

It is a dreary scenario, but moderating it there are some positive factors which have also to be taken into account.

In the first place, in various parts of the world articulate individuals and groups, though still relatively small in number, are beginning to raise their voices against this suicidal process and trying to make others conscious of the contemporary human predicament. While sane and superior alternatives are being sought, there are also signs of growing resistance to the many harmful projects and activities of those who control centres of power. These positive efforts have yet to gather momentum, but their emergence and active presence are not unregistered or altogether marginal.

Secondly, in virtually every civilisation while minority elite groups have always enjoyed and monopolised the benefits and achievements of organised living, the overwhelming majorities have been systematically deprived of the main portion of the fruits of their labour. The services of the latter have always been essential for the existence and growth of each civilisation, but they have themselves been made to live in conditions of poverty, wretchedness and marginality. Elaborate systems of myths, rituals, religious beliefs and practices, codes of conduct and structures of relationships have been devised to benumb their natural feelings of resentment and urge for improved conditions, and to reduce them socio-culturally to resigned acceptance of such gross inequity and oppression. In our own times, however, the wretched of the earth are beginning to demand social recognition and actual realisation of their basic human rights, to have their just share of the achievements and resources, to be effective partners of the decision-making processes. If this development is guided by more light than heat, by constructive visions and cooperative endeavours, and is not sought to be violently suppressed by those who are currently in positions of power, or disoriented by the accumulated passions of frustration, hatred and violent retribution on the part of the oppressed, it may bring about more far-reaching and fruitful changes in the very nature of civilisation than we have known so far in history.

Creative Spirit

And a no less important factor to note is that in history, while civilisations have risen and decayed, new beginnings have repeatedly been made, often in the same region, often elsewhere. The inventive and recuperative powers of the human race never totally dried up even after the collapse of great civilisations. Once mankind equipped itself with written languages, ideas and norms, institutions and tools, its cultural evolution never entirely stopped. Thanatos is admittedly a very strong force in the human psyche; but the capacity of homo sapiens to rejuvenate itself, to start anew and give proof of its creative potentiality is also almost unlimited. This is witnessed in the historic phenomenon which may be generically called renaissance or rebirth or renewal of the creative spirit of man, a phenomenon of which the most well-known model is the spectacular sequence of the cultural developments in Italy from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century, but which also has happened repeatedly in other places and other times.

In any case, although we do fully recognise the fearful state and suicidal propensity of modern civilisation, as intelligent and responsible human beings we may not resign ourselves to this doom of decay and destruction. Nor may we delude ourselves that some *deus ex machina* from somewhere will appear

and save us. The stars are indifferent to the fate of the human species, and history has no direction except what is given to it by those who people it. If humanity is to be rescued out of the maturing global disaster, then the rescuing will have to be done by the human beings themselves. The victims alone can be their own saviours. The situation will not change on its own without a changed perception by human beings of themselves, of their relation with the world and of their dynamic role in the making of civilisation and history. The prevailing atmosphere of cynicism, nihilism and apathy, of alienation, amoralism and terror will have to be confronted and overcome, and a rediscovery and reaffirmation made of humanity's virtually inexhaustible inner resources – the ability to draw upon the rich inheritance of the past for moving towards a better future, to learn, discover and invent, to love, create and cooperate. For this it will be necessary to examine the process which had led us to the verge of a global catastrophe, and to pool together ideas, efforts and experiments which indicate probable ways of preventing it, and of moving towards a universal civilisation which is open, harmonious, just and humane. Differences are likely to be there in diagnosis and programming, but in view of the urgency of the situation and the common pursuit, the spirit of cooperation and flexibility shall have to prevail over undue accentuation of differences. In any case, a consensus among men and women of goodwill is essential about the urgent need for a reawakening of the creative spirit and self-confidence in the common people. It is this reawakening of humanity on a global scale to its inner resources which alone can take it beyond despair and resignation, and which I choose to call a new renaissance.

II

As I have already mentioned, if we take a global view of the history of civilisation, renaissance as a phenomenon would seem to be a regular feature of that history. The creative potentialities of the human species have repeatedly reaffirmed themselves – even when in one region or another they may have, for stretches of time, fallen into a dormant state. Progress is not inevitable in history, but enough evidence is available to indicate that since the birth of ancient civilisations around five thousand years ago, no period has been altogether barren. In one region or another of the world there have occurred phenomenal rebirths or reaffirmations of the creative spirit of the human race. The decay and destruction of the Harappan civilisation, for example, was followed by the emergence and evolution of the Vedic. Even the terrible holocaust recorded in the Mahabharata did not entirely wipe out all traces of civilisation from India. In fact, between 800 B.C. and 400 B.C. a spectacular intellectual renaissance took place in the subcontinent which expressed itself

in the Upanishads, the philosophical speculations of *Sankhya* and *Vaisesika*, the heretical exploration of the *Charvakas*, and in the great ethical movements pioneered by Buddha and Mahavira.

Elsewhere too great civilisations rose and fell – the Egyptian, the Assyrian, the Babylonian, the Chaldean, the Phoenician, the Cretan. Nearer in time, intellectually and artistically one of the most fecund and expressive was the Hellenic or Greek followed by the Hellenistic and the Roman. The decline and fall of the Roman civilisation and the sack of Rome by the barbarians marked the beginning of a prolonged dark age in Europe, but a great civilisation arose elsewhere, the civilisation of the Arabs or Saracens which was transcontinental, straddling large parts of Europe, Asia and North Africa, and which produced an abundance of philosophy, science, history, literature, architecture and new institutions and moral codes. Rich civilisations also developed in China and Korea and in several parts of South America. Globally, the light was never extinguished though in some regions, there were periods of prolonged darkness. Not unoften later civilisations drew inspiration from the rediscovery of what for a time had become man's forgotten cultural heritage. They incorporated achievements of earlier civilisations, made improvements upon them and opened vistas of new possibilities of development.

Indifferent Universe

In fact, looking at history, one is repeatedly struck by the epic and incessant struggle between what Freud described as the instinct of Eros and the instinct of Thanatos, between the forces of generation and destruction in the human psyche. From the point of view of human survival and growth, nature also seems to have a similar duality – there are elements which favour life and those which cause havoc and disaster. While the universe is indifferent to the fate of man, the instinct of survival would appear to be quite strong in all forms of life. In the case of man, this instinct requires to be nourished, equipped, guided and provided with a propitious physical, social and cultural milieu, while the death instinct has to be kept under intelligent control. Civilisations are created in the course of this endless endeavour, but they are never completely secure, since forces hostile to life both inside and outside man constantly threaten the forces of life and growth. Hence there is no inevitability of progress, but there has always been and there still is the possibility of humanity's learning from the past, of drawing upon the positive heritage of the achievements of earlier civilisations, of moving towards a healthier and more harmonious order of social existence which would enhance and encourage

creative self-expression and happy relationship among ordinary human beings. In a broad sense, that is what a renaissance really amounts to.

End of the Dark Night

However, in a strictly narrow sense, the word renaissance is commonly used by historians to indicate the rather spectacular phenomenon which took place first in Italy and then in other parts of West Europe from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century AD and which ushered in what is called the modern age. The term renaissance was first consciously used by the Florentine writers of the fifteenth century who saw in this phenomenon the re-birth of the human spirit that had virtually died or fallen into deep slumber after the fall of Rome. The great outburst of creativity which was taking place all around them – in painting, sculpture, and architecture, in vernacular literature and natural philosophy, in printing and other inventions – struck them as marking the end of the long dark night of Europe. The philosopher Pico della Mirandola declared in his famous *Discourse on the Dignity of Man* that in the entire universe man was the only animal who was born with the freedom to choose, to lay down laws for his own species, to recreate himself and shape history.

During the European renaissance, the traditional notion of man as fragile, helpless and sin-ridden, so very carefully propounded and propagated by the Church was challenged, discarded and replaced by the view of man as unique, multiform and creative, as a reservoir of inexhaustible potentiality, as maker of his own destiny. Preoccupation with an imaginary supernatural world order and with death and retribution after death gave way to growing interest in and careful study of man and nature, and to the discovery and utilisation of resources for making life in this world richer and worth cherishing. "More and more people turned from the medieval absorption in the problem of sin and salvation which tended to withdraw them from life and make them others (worldly) to the task of making themselves more fully at home on a friendly earth" (F. Schevill, *The First Century of Italian Humanism*). As the spirit of inquiry and exploration grew stronger, faith in mysteries and miracles and in the efficacy of obscurantist explanations and practices diminished. In sculpture and poetry, the beauty of the human body was celebrated; in philosophical essays and discourses, in comedies and tragedies, the immense powers of the human mind were proclaimed. From the highest reaches of the sky to the most hidden and dark innards of the earth, from the very complex organisation and workings of the human body and mind to the strange topography of the most distant shores of oceans, from the hoariest past to the foreseeable future – everything began to come under human scrutiny and investigation. The individual started the exciting journey of rediscovering himself as a great source of creativity, knowledge and enterprise. While artists and writers created new

worlds from ingredients they found around them, philosophers offered new visions, scientists revolutionised the traditional view of the cosmos, entrepreneurs laid the foundations of new political institutions and a new dynamic economy, and adventurers and explorers travelled deserts, mountains and high seas and discovered new routes and continents. From Petrarch and Boccaccio to Montaigne, Cervantes and Shakespeare; from Botticelli and Leonardo da Vinci to Durer, Titian and Raphael; from Pico della Mirandola to Thomas More, Erasmus and Bacon; from Copernicus and Kepler to Bruno and Galileo; the Voyages of Columbus and Vasco da Gama – these and a large number of other people pioneered the modern age in history.

New Systems

The centuries of the renaissance were followed by centuries of expansion and development during which reliable knowledge, based on increasingly precise observation and careful experiment, grew by leaps and bounds, rapidly building up various scientific disciplines. New systems of social, economic and political institutions came to be established, in some countries relatively peacefully through gradual reforms, in others by violent revolution and dramatic overflow of old and decayed regimes. Together with the institutions came new laws, codes of conduct, and forms of relationships which were in consonance with them and which stressed individual freedom and unrestricted enterprise, proclaimed the rule of law and the doctrine of human rights, emphasised the central role of science and technology in human development, but which also tended to reduce man to subjection to the machine. However, application of scientific knowledge together with the requirements of political economy led to invention of ever-improving tools and techniques which brought about phenomenal increase in the productivity of labour and radical transformations in transport and communications. The world's population began to grow at an unprecedented rate while different regions of the world, separated by great distances, were being brought closer to one another and pushed towards greater uniformity by the growing pressures of new technology.

Despite the extremely critical situation which mankind faces today – a situation for which some of the trends and features of modern civilisation are to a large extent, though not entirely, responsible – a situation which has generated in many sensitive minds a feeling of revulsion towards modernisation – it will nevertheless be a fatal error not to recognise the advances in many areas achieved by modern civilisation, or not to draw upon them, when trying to bring about a new renaissance and a healthier and happier world order. Among the more positive accomplishments of the modern age at least the following seem to stand out quite clearly:

- a) Continuous and increasingly rapid growth of reliable knowledge or various scientific disciplines with their ever refining concepts, methods and tools of inquiry and verification;
- b) Application of knowledge through technological innovations thereby dramatically increasing productivity of labour and the wealth of nations;
- c) Conquest of epidemics and pestilence like plague, cholera and small pox, major advances in prophylactic and curative medicines, and consequent decline in mortality rates and increase in average life expectancy;
- d) Rapidly growing recognition within many countries and on a global scale of the basic principle and socio-political philosophy of fundamental and inalienable human rights – a recognition which began in the eighteenth century with the Declarations of the American and the French Revolutions and which, in our century, is incorporated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations;
- e) Invention of printing and other means and media which has made knowledge accessible to an ever-growing number of people; and
- f) Successive revolutions in the means and methods of transport and communication, making it possible to conquer vast distances and bring the world to the doorsteps of everybody.

In short, despite its defects and shortcomings, the modern age introduced a new phase in human history where possibilities were opened for building up a civilisation based on untrammelled inquiry and scientific knowledge, personal freedom, secular morality, social justice, fundamental rights, creativity and enterprise, health, education and prosperity for all. What then has brought mankind to the contemporary situation threatening global disaster?

III

There is of course no simple answer, for the processes of history are very complex, involving as they do the many dark forces in the human psyche and the innumerable events and crosscurrents in the natural and social environment. However, critics of modern civilisation have pointed out quite a number of its more serious flaws and shortcomings, and some of them seem clearly to have bearing on the contemporary crisis.

One of the most injurious is the rapidly worsening relation between man and his natural environment in modern civilisation, especially since the industrial revolution. Since its emergence mankind has been trying to establish a growing measure of control over its physical environment. In the beginning this was needed for bare survival; later it made the transformation of primitive societies into civilisations possible. However, before industrial revolution, human control

or manipulation of nature did not reach such magnitude on a global scale as would seriously jeopardise the ecological balance which is essential for life on earth. There is in nature a subtle and all embracing inter-relatedness of elements, between the living and non-living, and among the various forms of the living, without which life would neither have appeared, nor survived, nor evolved. Disruptions have taken place, but the web of relationships has again been restored. In the modern age, rapid development of scientific knowledge and its application to technology brought about the industrial revolution which, during the last two centuries, has caused disruptions and imbalances on an unprecedented global scale. Mountains have been quarried, fossils buried for millennia in the darkest recesses of the earth have been dug out and put to use as fuels, large ancient forests have been destroyed, many species of insects, birds and animals virtually exterminated, the natural flow of many rivers fatally hampered by putting up ill-conceived barrages with a view to immediate gains but without proper consideration of their longtime consequences, ecological relationships of mutual dependence radically disrupted in many parts of the world almost beyond repair. As has been already mentioned, particularly serious is the erosion of the ozone layer by the release and concentration of chloro-fluorocarbons in the atmosphere caused by the phenomenal increase in the consumption of fossil fuels, especially during the last half century. Many fertile regions are being rapidly driven to barrenness by the excessive use of chemicals, fertilisers and insecticides, and not only earth but air and water are also getting poisoned on an increasingly bigger scale.

Knowledge is Power

It would seem that while the phenomenal growth of scientific knowledge and its utilisation in technology gave modern civilisation access to enormous power over the environment, it did not develop in the modern mind an adequate understanding or appreciation of the very subtle and fundamental relation of interdependence between the human species and its environment. Knowledge gives power, but power unguided by ethical considerations or unimbued with aesthetic sensibility can lead to disaster. Although initially this was not particularly pronounced, from the eighteenth century onwards pursuit of power increasingly became the primary objective of modern civilisation. Nature not only provides food but also psychological nourishment in a thousand ways. The vast open sky with its millions of stars, the winds and rivers with their endless musical themes and variations, the mountains, hills and forests, the birds, beasts and insects – their great variety and presence in a cosmic order – all flow into and shape our aesthetic sensibility from the dark months in the womb till we return to the elements. Modern civilisation has caused fatal disruptions in this process by its almost single minded preoccupation with power to control everything. Not only physical nature and various living

species, but the human species itself has been sought to be manipulated by those who have access to enormous power in modern civilisation. The bleak despair and sense of violence which characterise much of contemporary literature, the virtual unredeemed barrenness of our current educational systems and institutions, the tinsel superficiality of contemporary culture – all bear witness to the alienation of man from his proper, natural and social milieu.

Worth of Democracy

The primary position which pursuit of power came to occupy in modern history rapidly weakened the ethical concern with the well-being of others, which normally derives at the beginning from the native instinct of love, affection, friendship. Competition instead of cooperation came to be emphasised and encouraged; success and aggrandizement replaced the goals of inner fulfillment and harmonious living; the humanism of the renaissance gradually gave way to a coarse variety of pragmatism, in which ethical scruples about the means employed were deliberately suppressed or erased in the name of the ends which, under various high-sounding disguises, were in fact power, profit or possession. In the past too various elite groups had exercised their dominance over the majority of the common people. But in modern civilisation, the magnitude and intensity of power at the disposal of a few has become unparalleled; and the checks devised so far have not proved at all effective. The worth of democracy as a political system should not be underestimated; it is certainly superior to any variety of authoritarian rule or dictatorship. Nevertheless, the fact has to be recognised that democracies, as they exist and function today, are in a way but mild variations of plutocracy, that unless genuinely effective ways are devised and successfully followed to decentralise all forms of power, political, economic, social and cultural, democracies will remain as they are today, more formal and nominal than actual or genuine.

One of the earliest historic consequences of the rise of modern civilisation was the rapid expansion of the west with its access to new knowledge and power, and the sharp and rapidly growing division of the world between the west and the non-west, a division in which most of the peoples of the non-west were after a while reduced to colonies or semi-colonies, and the peoples of the west thrived by exploiting the majority of the human race. Aggressive adventurers and entrepreneurs from the countries of West Europe gained control over the destinies of vast populations and immense resources of non-western countries and established empires across immense oceans and continents. There were violent shipments of captive Africans as slaves to serve the white settlers in North America, while much of Asia, and virtually

the whole of Central and South America experienced plunder and devastation. As modern technology conquered distance and brought the farflung races and cultures into some kind of a global system, inequalities among different peoples, measured mainly in terms of scientific knowledge, technology and material standards of living, were greatly sharpened, reducing the majority of mankind into manipulable means to serve the ends of the powerful majority. In the new cultural climate, possession of power increasingly became the chief criterion of rectitude. The power-elite groups, initially limited almost entirely to the west but in the present century also extended to a certain extent to parts of the non-western world mainly through the process of "decolonisation", have a vested interest in retarding or delaying the emancipation of the wretched of the earth. Without a radical reorientation of the historic process, inequalities between as well as within countries are unlikely to be reduced, thereby aggravating discontent, frustration, destructiveness and violence throughout the world.

Nation-States

The bourgeoisie, as a class, has had a leading role in the emergence, expansion and consolidation of modern civilisation, and today it continues to press it towards a global catastrophe. It produced nation-states and the political economy of capitalism. Wars, of course, are as old as human history, but the vast conglomerations which form nation-states with their militant ideology of nationalism bring about enormous concentration of power in the hands of governments, and give to the bureaucracy, the army and the police permanently central positions in the socio-political system. Fascism and Nazism were the most virulent forms of nationalism, but all nationalisms are by their very nature aggressive and collectivist. Nationalism tends to paralyse the individual's discrimination and conscience – his or her sense of truth and untruth, right and wrong, of obligation to mankind – by putting exclusive emphasis on the reified collectivity called the nation. Nation-states require increasing diversion of resources to systematic preparations for war in the name of national security and defence. Fear and hatred of other nation-states and mass-hysteria deliberately fomented by governments provide justification for growing military expenditure, and eventually for war.

The rest of nation-states went hand in hand with the development and spreading out of the political economy of capitalism. Cultivation of the spirit of enterprise and along with it invention, promotion and utilisation of increasingly more efficient tools, techniques, skills and forms of economic organisation are among the positive features of capitalist economy, and its achievements, measured in terms of the increased material wealth of nations, have certainly been quite impressive. At the same time, capitalism, especially

since the industrial revolution, has made exploitation of the vast majority of the people by a relatively small minority, both internationally and within each nation state, much more intensive than ever. Profit being its principal motivating force, capitalism has no scruples about dehumanising human beings as long as profit is ensured. Under capitalism, technology tends to reduce individuals into unidimensional creatures who gradually become no more than mere means to the end of profit, and replaceable like parts of a machine when their usefulness is exhausted. Labour loses all sap and creativity; workers and their managers become differently positioned zombies, apathetic but greedy, alienated from themselves, from their work, family, community and nature. Money fetishism replaces the sense of the intrinsic worth of persons, relations, activities and objects. Priorities get topsy-turvy. Instead of trying to meet the basic common needs of everyone, the economy promotes conspicuous consumption among the middle and lower-middle classes. Torn from traditional moorings and sense of security, deprived of personal integrity and harmonious relationship with others, driven by greed and possessiveness, individuals tend to form lonely crowds, easily excited and driven to violence. The destructive forces in the human psyche begin to gain the upper hand over the life-favouring forces, threatening the very fabric of civilisation.

Humanist Principle

The humanism of the European renaissance which ushered in the modern civilisation would seem to have been largely eroded by later developments when power became the central pursuit and the flaws and shortcomings of the new civilisation began to come into sharper relief. As we find almost everywhere today, people from their earliest childhood are being taught by the family, the school, the community, not so much to appreciate and cultivate intellectual, aesthetic and moral values, as to prize money, success, control over the lives of others, acquisition of more and more material goods. Modern social, political and economic systems, whether bourgeois, fascist, communist or social-democratic, repudiate more or less in their actual working the basic humanist principle that the free and creative unfoldment of every man, woman and child is the true measure of the worth of any society. Such unfoldment, requires understanding and imagination, integrity and compassion, urge to be free and creative, spirit of cooperation among people and harmony between the human species and the rest of nature. Acquisitiveness and the pursuit of power have made the modern man an aggressor against everything human and non-human, an exploiter and oppressor of those who are poor and unorganised, a pathological type which hates and distrusts the world and suffers from both loneliness and delusions of grandeur.

It is by removing from modern civilisation the serious flaws and shortcomings which have contributed to the present critical situation, and by envisioning positive alternatives which have human well-being as their goal, and by developing a movement for their realisation that we may hope to get out of the contemporary crisis and lay the foundations of a new and superior civilisation. A new renaissance will mark the beginning of that historic process.

IV

A new renaissance will presumably involve in the first place an unambiguous affirmation of the very close interdependence of the human species and its environment, and a firm commitment to undo the steps and reverse the processes which have brought about the contemporary ecological imbalance and pushed mankind to the precipice of global disaster. The nexus of relationships between the human and the non-human is subtle, immanent and all-pervasive. At the beginning of modern civilisation, the Copernican revolution replaced the geocentric view of the universe with the heliocentric. Today, we require a thorough re-examination of the anthropocentric view of the world which has dominated for so long. It is obviously myopic and wrong to view all non-human existence as but mere means to serve human requirements. The living and the non-living, with their infinite variety of forms and transformations, have an order and rhythm in which the human has its own unique place. By causing disruption in that order and rhythm, mankind endangers both its own survival and that of the habitable earth.

In fact, the very development of the unique qualities of the human species – ability to think, know, imagine, express, shape, create – depends on its sensitiveness to and appreciation of all that surrounds it and to which it is closely related. The vast expanse of the open sky with its wonderful galaxies and stars and planets, the oceans and rivers and winds with their multitudinous musical themes and variations, the majestic snowcapped mountains and the homelier hills, the mysterious forests and green grasslands with their myriad varieties of vegetation, animals, birds and insects – they all form a cosmos from which mankind not only draws sustenance but also a stimuli for aesthetic, intellectual and moral growth. A new renaissance will surely have to give top priority in its programme to preventing thoughtless spoliation of nature by human greed and to developing appreciation on an ever-widening scale of the human's kinship with the non-human and the aesthetic, intellectual and moral implications of this kinship.

I have already indicated that one of the principal banes of modern

civilisation has been to make possession of evergrowing power the almost central pursuit of the human race. Knowledge gives power, and power is admittedly necessary for survival and development. But pursuit of power, unregulated by other very important considerations, lead to disastrous consequences, as we have seen repeatedly in our times. The view of man as *machismo*, so assiduously cultivated in modern societies, has done incalculable harm not only to the non-human world but also to the human psyche. Such life-supporting qualities as kindness, affection, patience, modesty, sympathy and consideration for the helpless and humble, have come to be regarded as "womanly" and inferior. Powerlust breeds sadism and violence, accentuates destructive propensities, and eventually leads to wars. The new renaissance will have to replace the exclusive pursuit of power from its central position with the pursuit of the well-being of all. Such well-being requires harmony and cooperation, knowledge and love, freedom and sense of responsibility and obligation to others, creativity and aesthetic experience.

Moral Obligations

This means, among other things, that a new renaissance will have to imbue science with ethical concern and aesthetic sensibility. It will require scientists to recognise that their pursuit of knowledge is not beyond good and evil, that it has inalienable moral obligations. The growing hiatus between the sciences and the humanities has to be bridged without delay, and a new humanism will have to evolve which integrates science, ethics and the arts.

In fact, in a new renaissance, the humanist reorientation of science will have a very crucial role. For too long scientists have allowed themselves to be used by governments and big business, or what is often called the military-bureaucratic-industrial complex, to serve ends which have clearly proved themselves to be inimical to life. It is essential today that scientists on the one hand stand up against such misuse of knowledge and, on the other, devote their explorations to the resolution of the terrible problems created by such misuse and to meeting the basic needs and requirements of human well-being. Sakharov was a rare example in our times of a great scientist refusing to obey the dictate of the totalitarian state that governed his country. A new renaissance calls for many such Sakharovs in whom science and conscience continue to produce a true integrity of spirit.

Among the fearful problems created by the unmitigated pursuit of power and misuse of science, some of the most pressing which need immediate attention of ethically motivated scientists are, for example, the huge stockpile of nuclear weaponry, the nuclear power plants and radio-active waste; the erosion of the ozone layer by chloro-fluorocarbons; and the poisoning of the

earth and water by the use of chemicals. The list is easy to enlarge, but the main point is that a new renaissance demands a reorientation of science and commitment on the part of the scientists to employ their growing intellectual resources to objectives which are ethically legitimate and essential to life's well-being.

Creative Labour

What is true of science applies equally to technology. Instead of reducing the worker into a replaceable element of an impersonal mechanical process and thus denuding the individual of her or his humanity, new tools, techniques, methods and forms of organisation will have to be found which will make labour creative, give the worker a sense of fulfillment in the work done, provide the person with an assurance of belonging. Many fertile minds will have to engage themselves in this programme of technological inventions and innovations. That too will be a major feature of a new renaissance.

A new renaissance is required to take a global view of mankind – of individual men and women being members of the human species, and thus inheriting the entire cultural heritage of the race and being responsible for the destiny of mankind as a whole. Human mind has to be freed from the influence of the virulent ideology of nationalism and other varieties of collectivist fanaticism which are the source of endless conflict and suffering. On the one hand, men and women have to learn to appreciate the rich plurality of languages, cultures, arts and crafts, myths and legends, styles of living and forms of social organisation, embodying local and regional differences of history and geography; on the other, this has to be supplemented with a growing comprehension of the universal needs and pursuits of mankind – of the deep and comprehensive nexus that binds all of us – of the innate unity which defines us as a species. A primary task of a new renaissance will be to devise ways and means for the growth of a truly cosmopolitan culture in which diversity and differences do not produce conflict and antagonism but are woven into a splendid, strong and self-generative pattern. It will cultivate unity in multiplicity but reject uniformity which imposes the mould of the big and the powerful on the weak and small, and denudes humanity of its inexhaustively multi-form creative potential.

Simultaneously with the pursuit of universality, a new renaissance will have to undertake the pressing and hard task of reversing the trends towards centralisation which characterise modern civilisation, and direct our knowledge, inventive power and organised effort towards development of grassroots institutions and communities on a scale where intelligent and effective participation by their members in the decision-making processes is possible and can be ensured.

The size, function and powers of such bodies will have to be determined by experience and by the specific context of each institution, but the main objective is to make certain that individuals are not crippled and reduced to manipulable objects by the institutions becoming too big, complex and management-dependent. The grass-roots institutions will have to be such as may be properly managed and directed by the members themselves to meet their genuine common needs of meaningful existence and growth. A new renaissance will have to formulate and popularise social theories and political economies which stress devolution of power and decentralisation of planning, which fully recognise the highly responsible role of the average citizen in the administration of the community's affairs, and the creative role of labour in the wealth-generating process. What the contemporary crisis requires is a life-oriented alternative to the two major competing forms of ideological-institutional necrosis – capitalism and the totalitarian state. In any restructuring of civilisation, much weight will have to be given to processes and programmes for the revitalisation of village communities, crafts, cottage industries and cooperatives – institutions which have suffered terribly from the modern civilisation's obsession with power, profit, competition, standardisation, manipulation and streamlining, at the cost of friendly relations, mutuality, personal integrity, creativity and sense of fulfillment.

Educational Movement

A new renaissance will also have to address itself to the complex and interrelated problems of overpopulation, rapidly growing demand for goods, services and luxuries, and pervasive economic and social inequality among different regions and within each state. Finding effective and peaceful ways and means for bringing down the rate of population growth on a global scale is today hardly less urgent than preventing the current drift towards ecological disaster. A powerful educational movement is also called for to persuade especially the middle classes to delimit voluntarily their material wants – to reduce substantially their conspicuous consumption of luxury goods – so that the earth's resources which are limited may be properly devoted to meet the basic needs of the deprived majority of the world's population. Such persuasion is, of course, not going to be easy, but it will necessarily be part of a new renaissance which involves a re-orientation of the minds as much of the privileged as of the deprived.

Removal, or atleast substantial and effective reduction, of inequality is probably the most formidable task, but a new renaissance will remain empty of significance unless its philosophy and programmes are clearly directed towards this end. The ideal of human equality had been proclaimed by the French Revolution, but the material wealth of the nations was at

that time rather limited. The material resources at the disposal of mankind have phenomenally increased during the last two hundred years, but the majority of the world's population continue to suffer from poverty, illiteracy, poor health, inequality and social injustice. Decentralisation and devolution of power, emergence and evolution of effective grassroots institutions and cooperatives, utilisation of resources to meet the basic needs of the common people (like food, shelter, education, health services etc.) instead of their being devoted to production of armaments and luxury goods, and similar developments are likely to reduce inequality, but how exactly these developments are to be brought about remains to be clearly formulated to give meaning and vigour to a new renaissance.

Karl Marx

A hundred and fifty years ago, Karl Marx had proclaimed that the modern bourgeois civilisation would be overthrown by the revolutionary proletariat which by establishing its dictatorship would usher in a new and radically superior civilisation. The tragic experience of our century has proved his proclamation to be altogether mistaken. Revolutions as anticipated by him did not take place anywhere. The violent upheavals which did take place and the totalitarian dictatorships which were established, claiming inspiration from his writings, inflicted immense suffering, planned dehumanisation on an unprecedented scale and colossal wastage without reducing inequality or injustice. A new renaissance will have to devise alternative methods and processes for laying the foundations of a sane society. In view of the unparalleled power of destruction and mass-manipulation at the disposal of today's centralised authorities, violent revolutions and dictatorships are likely to be as disastrous as wars. Moreover, a new renaissance will have to find a reasonable and effective solution to the problem of inequality, not only within nation states or relatively small communities, but also among nations and regions which, in fact, has kept growing over the last several decades. How the economically much more prosperous nations and the immensely powerful multinationals are to be made to share equitably their wealth and power with the economically less advanced, how the resources now controlled by a few are to be diverted from their current misuse and employed to meet the basic needs of the majority – this is a highly complex but urgent problem to which the thinkers of a new renaissance will have to address themselves without delay.

I have here only tried to indicate some of the major features and problems of a new renaissance in the context of the crisis of modern civilisation. About fifty years ago, I wrote two books under the inspirational guidance of the late philosopher revolutionary Manabendra Nath Roy, *Radicalism* (1946) and *In Man's Own Image* (1948, jointly with Ellen Roy), in which we proposed

radical humanism as the philosophy of a new renaissance. Since then problems have become more acute and complex; new issues have acquired prominence. My awareness of the human predicament has also, I hope, gained from extensive travels and studies in many countries and from exposure to the explorations of many other thinkers of our age like Erich Fromm, Ival Illich, E. F. Schumacher, Karl Popper, Simon Weil, Hannah Arendt, Albert Camus, Erich Kahler, Levi-Strauss, Herbert Marcuse, Lewis Mumford, David Riesman, Hazel Henderson, to a name but a few. I realise that no single school of thought can claim to provide comprehensive solutions and that sustained and cooperative effort on the part of many competent persons and institutions is required if we are to change the disastrous course of modern history.

Initially, the need for a new renaissance is deeply felt by those sensitive and conscientious men and women who perceive the immense dimensions of the crisis of our age. A renaissance has to begin with a few gifted, articulate and committed people – thinkers, artists, social workers, persons of conscience and of dedication to the well-being of all – and at least in the first phase, they unavoidably constitute an elite in any society. However, they have to start with a clear understanding that a new renaissance must involve the common people at the grassroots level, that without the free, intelligent and effective participation of the common people, a new renaissance will end in a *cul-de-sac*. Unlike the earlier renaissance, a new renaissance will have to reject unambiguously from the very beginning every variety of elitistic attitudes and hierarchic relationships. The crisis cannot be overcome by thinking of the people as the masses. Only through the conscious participation of the common people in the restructuring of civilisation will such renaissance gain nourishment and momentum. Our knowledge, imagination and technological resources and skills will have to be oriented towards an awakening of the people to their own reasoning power and creative potentialities. I am also inclined to think that the pioneers of a new renaissance are required to pledge to themselves to eschew all positions of power and privilege and never to use for private gain what moral and intellectual authority they may acquire in the community on account of their knowledge, skills and dedicated service. Their integrity has to be unassailable, and their influence has to be directed to discouraging formation of hierarchies of power which seek to keep the majority of the people in a state of ignorant devotion and dependence.

Many Lamps

The threat posed globally by the nuclear plants, weapons and arsenals rapid pollution of environment and erosion of the ozone layer, population

explosion and polarisation of the haves and the havenots both internationally and within the nation-states, the spread of moral nihilism, obscurantism, cretinisation and terror—this ubiquitous and conglomerate threat calls pressingly for a positive response from men and women of conscience and understanding. That response, if it takes place on a noticeable scale, will constitute a new renaissance. It will require a global perspective and involve a restructuring of society and a radical reorientation of contemporary political economies; most important of all, it demands a creative reformulation of the priorities of civilised living. But it cannot afford to seek shortcuts, or employ means which defeat its ends. Transformations, far-reaching and global, have to be brought about primarily through education and constructive work through a wise combination of patient cooperative effort from below and pooling of resources by persons of percipience and imagination, by the lighting of many modest lamps of understanding and goodwill in thousands of homes and small communities. A renaissance, as I see it, will be a process, spread over a period of time, embracing villages and towns, schools and factories, families, workshops and trade-unions, drawing its sustenance from the growing number of men and women who are engaged in developing themselves, individually and in cooperation, into persons committed to freedom, truth, creativity, compassion and the pursuit of unity in diversity. Since history knows no inevitability, I do not know if such a renaissance will take place, but it is by working for it that I and many others like me find life worthwhile and meaningful. ♦

RATIONALIST FOUNDATION

A Foundation for the promotion of rationalism and allied objects has been formed in Mumbai with a corpus of Rs.5 lacs. It is called the **Rationalist Foundation**.

The Objects of the Foundation are :

- (a) The promotion of rationalism viz. belief in the efficacy of reason as the sole source of knowledge and that attitude of mind which does not acknowledge the arbitrary authority of any individual or book;
- (b) The promotion of secularism viz. the belief in the irrelevance of religions for the purpose of human lives in this world and in the separation of religion from all public affairs;
- (c) The promotion of humanism viz. regard for human values and the dignity of the individuals; and
- (d) The promotion of atheism viz. non-acceptance of the hypothesis of the existence of God and the belief in the irrelevance of God in human affairs.

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Mr. Justice R. A. Jahagirdar (Retd.) is the Settlor of the Trust.

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Prof. Sibnarayan Ray

Professor Sibnarayan Ray was a close associate of M. N. Roy during the last eight years of the latter's life. He was Chairman of the Department of Indian Studies at the University of Melbourne, Australia, for nearly twenty years. Also Professor at the Universities of Bombay and California (Santa Barbara); Director of Rabindra Bhavana, Visva Bharati University; Research Fellow at the Universities of London and Chicago; and visiting lecturer at Oxford, Cambridge, Heidelberg, and various other Universities in Europe, the United States, Australia and Asia. He gave the main address at the Third World Congress of Humanists at the University of Oslo, Norway, and was a member of the Executive and Board of Directors of International Humanist and Ethical Union, Holland; Chaired the First International Congress on Modernisation in Asia at the Korea University, Seoul; was Director of the International Seminar on El Papel de la Inteligencia en las Sociedades Asiáticas Contemporáneas at the University of Mexico. Author of about forty books in English and Bengali; he has been editing a Bengali quarterly of ideas and enquiry (Jijnasa) for the last eighteen years. He has been recently honoured with an Emeritus Fellowship in Literature. Prof. Ray is at present the Chairman of the Raja Rammohun Roy Library Foundation.

Besides writing a number of books in English and Bengali, he is engaged in editing the Selected Works of M. N. Roy, four volumes of which have already been published. He is also writing a three-volume biography of M. N. Roy, the first volume of which has been published by Minerva Associates (Publications) Pvt. Ltd. of Calcutta.