

BOOK - REVIEWS

Choose Life, A Dialogue, Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, (Ed.) Richard L. Gage, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1987 (Being the Commonwealth edition of the *Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue* :

Man Himself Must Choose, first published in 1976 by Kodansha International Ltd., Tokyo, Newyork & San Francisco).

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Humanity at the Crossroads : An Inter-cultural Dialogue, Karan Singh & Daisaku Ikeda, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988.

Edited by Richard L. Gage, *Choose Life* is a Dialogue between late Arnold Toynbee, the celebrated historian-philosopher and Daisaku Ikeda, the President of Soka Gakkai, the largest Buddhist lay organization in Japan, held during the years 1971 and 1974, and is inspired by a common concern, i.e., the future of Man under the impact of modern technological civilization which, without a corresponding increase in ethical performance and moral culture, poses a grave challenge to the very survival of the human race. Man's technological prowess versus his moral immaturity, which further threatens the dignity of man and nature and endangers human survival, is the central theme of the Dialogue. The theme is further amplified by a critical evaluation of the impact of technological civilization on the individual, social, political as well as religious life of Man. Present Dialogue between Toynbee and Ikeda, a Western Christian and an East

Asian Buddhist, can be considered as a global plea to Man in the nuclear age to Choose Life by opting a course of balanced development of scientific and spiritual culture,

Dialogue is initiated with concern over the Personal and Social Life of Man, who, inspite of sharing physiological functions with non-human fellow animals, is a self-conscious spiritual being, a distinction which invests man with a sense of 'dignity' in managing his personal as well as social affairs. Man's concern for 'dignity' is the basic cord which runs throughout the work, surfaces at key points, and ultimately emerges in the concluding portion of the work (pp. 339-342) as the Highest Human value which is absolute and universal. In the discussion of issues concerning the Individual, like heredity and environment, mind, body, sub-conscious etc. or on Social issues like Environment, Intellect, Health etc. the participants initially present their basic approach towards an issue of perennial importance, its status or scope under various traditions including modern approaches, discuss the contemporary problems associated with the phenomenon which may be direct result of the progress in technology, and present possible solutions. Since this methodology provides a key to understanding various social, political or philosophical issues which otherwise apparently seem unrelated, it may be illustrated by giving one example relating to Environment.

The basic issue of relationship between Man and Nature, presently termed 'Environment' opens with Ikeda's elaboration of the term *Esho Funi* or the Buddhist concept of the oneness of Man and Nature or the unity of the subject and environment in cosmic life-force, it's attestation by Toynbee in the *Weltanschauung* of the pre-Christian Greeco-Roman world, its total violation under Judaic monotheism according to which God placed the whole of his non-human creation at the disposal of man (vide p. 39), glorification of Nature by Jesus and reco-

gnition of kinship between man and nature, animate or inanimate, by the Western Christian saint like Francis of Assisi. Recounting the early stages on man's total dependence on nature, the participants examine the issue of man's ultimate mastery over environment because of the advancement of scientific technology, which in turn leads to the discussion of contemporary problems and issues, such as natural and man-made disasters, urban problems of landprices, transportation, environmental pollution, and spells a word of caution to avoid the imminent doom which would be the fate of man if the over-exploitation of the bounties of nature is not controlled.

The process outlined above allows the participants to voice their respective positions, clear differences and arrive at a consensus, where possible. In case of social issues like assisting the aged, mass media and freedom of press or moral justification for abolition of Death Penalty, Toynabee and Ikeda reach a consensus, while in case of Suicide and Euthanasia, both unfold their respective positions. According to Toynbee 'suicide and euthanasia are fundamental and indispensable human rights' and 'human dignity is violated when a human being is kept alive against his will' (p. 156). Ikeda, as a Buddhist, firmly believes that, 'decision of when to end life ought to be left to the life force itself' and that 'termination of life is determined at a level beyond human consciousness and is unrelated to intellect or emotion' (p. 157).

The impact of worldwide network of technological and economic relations established during the last five hundred years on the political systems and international issues is critically examined by the two participants which leads to a logical deduction that the unification of the world on technological and civilizational

level (western) must ultimately result in the unification of the world on political and religious levels. Evaluating limitations of the present political systems and powers backed by the strength of technology with its resultant greed and pride, the two main accomplices of the technological culture, as displayed by events like bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Toynbee and Ikeda expect the emergence of a new political and religious systems capable of unifying the world politically and spiritually. "In a future voluntary unification of mankind on a global scale", as Toynbee believes, "an important part is likely to be played by the world-wide spread of some kind of common religion" the basic precept of which will be 'self-mastery' by man. Self-mastery alone, and not material enrichment because of advances in Science and technology, would lead to controlling greed, pride and aggressiveness resulting in two-fold objectives of abolition of war and the restraint of aggressive competitiveness in near future and ultimately in restoration of full human Dignity which is the highest human value.

Dealing with varied issues of contemporary importance as well as perennial nature evaluated by the keen eye of a historian, who not only looks into the past but the future as well, and presented in a mature logical manner *Choose Life* is a document which depicts Man's vulnerable situation under the growing power of scientific technology till he decides his own role and becomes the master of the situation he has created for himself. Wide range of issues have been discussed each of which is complete in itself and yet is as much a part of the holistic conception of Toynbee of which the entire creation is an integral part. The work needs to be studied by every concerned human being to understand what is at stake if Man, by mistake or otherwise, does not opt to Choose Life.

Humanity At Crossroads : An Inter-Cultural Dialogue, is a published version of the oral discussion between Karan Singh and Daisaku Ikeda during the years 1979-80 and is based on a common concern over the crises of modern civilization which has made astonishing advances in technology and acquired vast power, but has not progressed in moral and spiritual dimension. The Dialogue explores the rich spiritual culture of the Orient with reference to Hinduism and Buddhism and aims to evaluate its possible contribution for the welfare of humanity in the East and the West by developing a global consciousness.

The Dialogue, in its written form, has been arranged in five chapters of which the first two concentrate on Vedic religion and development of Upanishadic Philosophy which served as a background for the rise of Buddhism and is a source for Hinduism. The next two chapters deal with the rise and fall of Buddhism in India and its impact on Indian society along with the spread of Buddhism outside India. In the concluding chapter the participants evaluate the potential of the rich tradition of the Orient in enriching the quality of human life by suggesting practical solutions to the problems of the present day world. Under the broad framework, mentioned above, the issues examined are twofold in nature : (1) historical descriptions of a particular issue or event, such as Links between the Indus Valley and Vedic Civilization, Early Aryan Society and Vedic Religion or the Date of the Buddha, Buddhism in Kashmir etc., and (2) discussions on fundamental principles, precepts or values and their respective role under a particular tradition which may play a positive role for the welfare of humanity. While historical descriptions have their own place and sometimes original interpretations have been offered by the participants with regard to a particular issue, it is the search for common values and principles which is the primary aim of the Dialogue and should be the focus for present purposes.

The participants' deep understanding of their respective tradition is reflected in their discussions on the basic concepts and their practical applications in the modern context. Thus, as a follower of the Buddhism preached by Nichiren Daishonin (1222-82 A. D.) in Japan, Daisaku Ikeda's positive approach towards solving the problems of life is based on the altruism of Mahayana Buddhism which according to him 'represents to perfection the true spirit of the Gautama Buddha' and believes in the 'principle of converting delusion into the attitudes and actions of the Bodhisattva and of turning the suffering of life and death into the enlightenment of Nirvana'. Further, the ultimate height of the spirit of the Mahayana teachings is considered to be represented by the Lotus Sutra which is taken to contain the essence of all Buddhism and forms the basis for Ikeda's conceptions. Karan Singh's forceful interpretations of the Hindu View of life are based not only on Vedic or Upanishadic philosophy, but on the combined strength of all sources of Hinduism which also includes in its fold all forms of Buddhism. It follows the Hindu tradition according to which Divinity pervades every atom of the universe and is, in ultimate analysis, 'seated within each individual'—a concept which endows spiritual dignity to every individual and needs to be advocated in present times.

Of greater interest are the issues where Ikeda and Karan Singh compare and contrast Hinduism and Buddhism, or trace parallels between the two. For example, Ikeda's view that Buddhism is born of an awareness of the limitations of Upanishadic thought which is more speculative than practical, considers truth as an external goal and could not become a part of the life of masses (vide p. 29) is aptly refuted by Karan Singh on all grounds except the fact that the Upanishadic seers sought only to lead their direct pupils to enlightenment, while the Buddha sought

enlightenment for all. Theory of Karma, Transmigration, enlightenment of a human being while still living on earth and salvation, i.e., Nirvana or Moksha etc. are common principles amongst the two. Karan Singh, however, is critical of the Buddhist conception of Soul and believes that a clear and unequivocal statement as given in the Bhagvadgīta, is a more satisfying position to take.

Interesting parallels can also be traced between the Ramarajya of Rama and Dharmarajya of Asoka, the dialogue of Milinda and Nagasena and of Janaka and Yajñavalkya. From philosophical point of view the amazing description of Assembly in Space in the Lotus Sutra may be compared with the Vishvaropadarshana in the Bhagavadgīta. Similar parallels can further be traced between Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism and a working framework combining the precepts of the two can be evolved for better understanding, peaceful coexistence and for the welfare of humanity at large.

While a dialogue between Hinduism and Mahayana Buddhism, such as the one initiated here, seems to be promising, more stringent efforts would be required to bridge the gap and come to some understanding between the other Buddhist sects, i.e., Hīnayana and Vajrayana towards which negative attitude is indicated in the discussion by Ikeda. Similarly, present arrangement of the work on historical lines leads to historical descriptions of issues and events which sometimes overshadow the discussion on basic human principles on which foundations for mutual understanding are to be based. Perhaps, division of the work on the basis of 'Concepts' would have been a more satisfying arrangement. Despite these minor issues, the very attempt on inter-cultural dialogue by Karan Singh and Ikeda is an appreciable venture and the two have succeeded in their basic aim of 'stimu-

lating greater awareness of the spiritual culture of the Orient ' which can fruitfully contribute to the welfare of modern humanity.

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- Saxena, Sushil Kumar; *Ever Unto God : Essays on Gandhi, and Religion*, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, New Delhi, 1988, pp. xii + 228; HC, Rs. 110/-.

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