

Transform and Live!!!!

M Qasim Bughio and Samina Najeeb

Abstract: The paper aims to study the socio political and economic affairs of the world in the context of the Post-modern philosophy. The paper appeals to the scholars to play their role in making this dismal world into a saner and safer world. The challenge that we all face today is to live responsibly, with cooperation, tolerance, and better judgment amid powers that shape the destiny of this world. We pay tribute to all religions and all lovers of humanity who have fought incessantly for the common good of mankind. We urge the privileged people of this world to be involved in community work for the alleviation of poverty and injustice as well as the teachers of this world to imbibe the values of justice, tolerance and equality in their young disciples and all those who are waiting to be lead.

Key words: scholars, peace, tolerance, better world.

1. Introduction

Aristotle, the disciple of Plato, is believed to be the father of philosophy. He is the first philosopher who talked about the conception of an ideal life of intellectual pursuit, linking the lives of individual human beings “qua” in a social context. His speculations on the State and government are the basis of the constitutions of several countries. His views about moral deliberation, the rights of individuals and that the aim of democracy being the common good of man, provide the bedrock for the world democracies today. But we have no doubt that had he been alive today, he would have been denounced as a dangerous radical. For it was none other than Aristotle, who stated that, in a perfect democracy, there will be a small number of rich and a small minority of very impoverished, who will use their rights to take the property of the rich. Aristotle, Alexander’s teacher, believed in equality and happiness to be the right of beings. Another great intellectual, a devotee of truth was Socrates, who gave up his life examining and upholding truth. He believed that true knowledge is acquired through understanding what values like virtue, piety, good and evil, mean. These were to name a few stalwarts of the ancient world, who spent their lives in searching for truth.

2. Discussion

Equality and justice have been the goals which the conscious beings have always aspired to. As we stroll down the memory lane, we remember quite distinctly an American maverick, Rosa Parks, a modest seamstress on her way home from work refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. That single act of defiance on December 1, 1955 led to the civil rights movement and she is respectfully remembered as the mother of this movement. She was a courageous and honorable woman with extensive education. A high school diploma was a rare and major accomplishment for an Afro-American woman of her day. Conscious of her rights, she refused to budge an inch or from acceding to the demand to give up her seat as she boarded the bus, because she was tired of giving in to injustice.

Another man of unmatched intellectual skills was Martin Luther King Jr. a priest and a radical worker for civil rights for members of the black American race, a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the leading organization of its kind in America.

In December 1955, he accepted the leadership of the first great Negro nonviolent demonstration of contemporary times in the United States, the bus boycott. The boycott lasted 382 days. On December 21, 1956, when the Supreme Court of the United States had declared unconstitutional the laws requiring

segregation on buses, Negroes and whites travelled in the buses as equals. He was assassinated, standing in the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee, where he was to lead a protest march in sympathy with the striking garbage workers of that city. He is still respected as the champion of human rights by the world. Another martyr for the human cause, whose memory lives on, even today, in our hearts, is the respected poet from Gaza, Rachel Corrie, a champion of equal rights, who never backed down. Her deep empathy for the human kind made her stand up in front of a bulldozer, about to pull down the home of a Palestinian family, and be crushed by it. Politicians like Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi have left a deep imprint on the world, and inspired millions. These humanitarians, irrespective of their creed, race or religion are respected globally, whether living or assassinated, their views, actions, and words have transcended time and entered into history and our hearts, forever.

The major challenges that confront our age are wide, ranging from environmental endangerment to poverty, from the struggle for human rights to genetic manipulation, from extremism to legacies of violence, warfare, and the global spread of physiological and spiritual diseases, all of which require a workable moral framework for addressing these problems. In a global village such as ours, the denizens must define core values aimed at respecting and enhancing the integrity of human beings. The challenge that we face today is to live responsibly, with cooperation, tolerance, and better judgment amid powers that shape the destiny of this world.

Mahatma Gandhi, a champion of non-violence in modern times, voiced his apprehensions about the contemporary world, when he warned us a century ago that "Civilization is the encouragement of differences. Civilization thus becomes a synonym of democracy. Force, violence, pressure, or compulsion with a view to conformity, is both uncivilized and undemocratic." (Miller, p 8)

Though the practice of physical bondage or slavery has been abolished, but the intellectuals like Milton Freedom, believes that the word freedom has become synonymous with capitalism, as it is evident from the title of his book, *Capitalism and Freedom*. Although the story of his world was told in the following manner by Charles Dickens, a great English writer of the Victorian age, yet he seems to be talking of the world as it exists today in his novel, "*The Hard Times*" "*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom; it was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of belief; it was the epoch of incredulity. It was the season of light; it was the season of Darkness. It was the spring of hope; it was the winter of despair. We had everything before us, we had nothing before us. We were all going direct to Heaven; we were all going direct the other way.*"

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a famous American poet once remarked and I quote that, "God enters by a private door into every individual" (Emerson, p72). This statement might be relevant a century ago but it does not hold true today. It is difficult to categorize people as religious or non-religious today, because of a wide range of beliefs within these religions themselves and also because of the cultural and social impact on the world religions. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the three major religions today, with a considerable number of followers spread across the world. The reverence for Prophet Abraham is a common nexus that ties them together. Despite their shared beliefs and deep reverence for the prophets, they have failed to live as brothers or members of the Abrahamic clan. Most of the serious religiously motivated conflicts, mass crimes against humanity and genocides in the 20th century have been between Muslims, Christians and Jews. The Bible and the holy Quran teach ethics of reciprocity and tolerance to its followers. In spite of the different name used for God, Muslims assert that they believe in the same deity as the Judeo-Christian religions.

The all encompassing thought of Islam is evident in multifarious verses in the holy Quran:

"We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Isma'il, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets, from their Lord: We make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allah do we bow our will (in Islam)." (The holy Quran, 3:84).

"Those with Faith, those who are Jews, and the Christians and Sabaeans, all who have Faith in Allah and the Last Day and act rightly, will have their reward with their Lord. They will feel no fear and will know no sorrow." (The holy Quran, 2: 62).

You will also come across many Biblical passages asking for tolerance and suffering for the sake of righteousness:

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along all malice. Be kind to one another. (Ephesians 4:31-32).

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. (Matthew 5:5).

The holy Quran mentions with great reverence the Christian scholars, while addressing its' believers, it says clearly " *...You will find the people most affectionate to those who have faith are those who say, 'We are Christians.' That is because some of them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.*" (*The Holy Quran 5:82*).

Having said that, we could have expected the priests and pastors, the knowledgeable literati of our world to bring the people of this world, together. Alas!! The world witnessed priests instigating people to burn the Holy book of the Muslim faith. In Foucault's view (1970) society is always historically situated. Foucault opines that every phase of history is an episteme. Harland (1987) describes an episteme to be a "set of rules, which are not consciously grasped, but which shape our thoughts and speech". This rivalry between Islam and Judeo-Christianity has its roots going back to the history of this world. We can thus infer that the material and the socio-cultural factors shape human consciousness. Marmaduke Pickthall, the author of *Tolerance in Islam: An Abridged Version of the 1927 lecture* remarked that:

"If Europe had known as much of Islam, as Muslims knew of Christendom, in those days, those mad, adventurous, occasionally chivalrous and heroic, but utterly fanatical outbreak known as the Crusades could not have taken place, for they were based on a complete misapprehension."

Though writers of the land of America may be talking of the Clash of Civilizations, but Foucault guides us that every age has many discourses and the nature of discourse is determined by the power patterns of the society. As researchers, we wholeheartedly support the post-modernist philosopher Foucault that truth is a political phenomenon. Nothing excludes social context, not even religious beliefs. Social context is a world view of a community that dominates a particular period in history. The Muslims have been persecuted and their Prophet ridiculed, internationally, especially after 9/11. The arrogant attitude of America en bloc and the helplessness that the people of the third world feel as they fall prey to the lawlessness, poverty, injustice, joblessness and inflation finds outlet in intolerance and aggression; It is a response to an unfair global system with double standards (violation of human rights by Israel, US, the attitude towards veil, caricature issue etc.) and unequal opportunity (veto system in the UNO) are the cause of frustration particularly when it is felt that Muslim rulers are not voicing the sentiment of their people. The Hosni Mubarak incident in Egypt is a witness to the kind of leadership that is no more acceptable to the oppressed people of the world.

Instead of giving a religious fervor to the strained relations between the powerful and the downtrodden it is the moral obligation of the intellectuals of the world to show the world that there would have been no Talibans in Afghanistan, if their leaders would have served the Afghan nation, conscientiously. This war on terror has annihilated innocent civilians more than the terrorists. We ask the people of the world that, do we want to stain our hands with the innocent blood of women and children? Or is it in the interest of the NATO allies that we keep fighting so that their weapon manufacturing industries may thrive??

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the world population rose rapidly, the rich nations became richer and the poor were fast becoming poorer. The people of the third world migrated to America in numbers, thinking it to be a land of opportunities. Economic boom reached to great heights in America. New drugs were discovered. The 1960s and 70s brought material prosperity to the West. Paul Krugman (2000), an economist notes "on sheer material grounds one would almost surely prefer to be poor today than upper middle class a century ago" (Myers, 2002: 632). So materially speaking, this was a historic period where a common citizen of the civilized world enjoyed all the material comforts, unknown to the royalty of the past. In the developing countries people were aware of this high quality of life and clamored for it. According to a United Nations report published in 1973 on "Multinational Corporations in World Development" by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (Myers, 2002: 96). "The United States accounts for more than half of multinational corporations having total annual sales of manufactures of more than \$1 billion, and also for more than half of the total estimated book value of investment, which by 1971 had reached

approximately \$160 billion. The United States, together with the United Kingdom, France and the Federal Republic of Germany, accounts for 80 per cent of foreign activities by multinational corporations. Multinational corporations, especially those of Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the United States, have grown dramatically in the last two decades, reflecting rapid post-war economic growth, technological advances and the intensified search for sources of raw materials and market outlets, and shifts in the relative economic power of major industrial countries. Although during the 1960s multinational corporation activities grew faster in developed host countries than in developing, and although the latter have received only half as much of the total estimated stock of direct investment as the developed countries, the presence of foreign multinational corporations in developing countries is generally of greater relative significance, since their economies together account for much less than half of the total of developed market economies. The distribution of investment in developing countries still reflects historical ties, some of a formerly colonial nature." (<http://unctc.unctad.org/data/e73iia11a.pdf>, retrieved on Nov 29, 2010 at 5 p.m)

Almost all the largest multinational firms are American, Japanese, or West European. Such corporations have had worldwide influence—over other business entities and even over governments, many of which have imposed controls on them. If one was to travel the world, Coca Cola, Pepsi, Mc Donalds, KFC, Levi and Nike products would practically be found everywhere. Lever Bros, Colgate & Palmolive, are some of the leading Multinationals, whose products we buy for the satisfaction of our needs and desires. This proliferation of American products across the globe is more than a mere accident. As a byproduct of globalization, it is part of a larger trend in the conscious dissemination of American attitudes and values that is often referred to as cultural imperialism. Herbert Schiller defines cultural imperialism as: "...the sums of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system, and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to or even to promote the values and structures of the dominant center of the system" (1976: 69).

Thus, cultural imperialism involves much more than simple consumer goods; it involves the dissemination of ostensibly American principles, such as freedom and democracy. Although the rise of individualism and industrialization did bring confidence and enhanced self-gratification to the post modern man, but the world seemed to have forgotten the teachings of the gospel of Isaiah, which states explicitly

"Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" C.E.O, Lexus advertising agency, trying to deny the popular adage, money can't buy happiness, once remarked that "Who ever said money can't buy happiness isn't spending it right" (Myers, 1998: 640). This concept of materialism did gratify the desires, but man had to pay a heavy price for it, the loss of spirituality and the solace of inner peace and contentment!!! The multinationals may flourish by leaps and bounds but the conscious people like those assembled here must motivate the CEOs to contribute towards community welfare and particularly to the noble cause of health and education in the countries, where they operate.

Last but not the least, the scholars must investigate and unveil the forces, which are unfortunately perverting peoples, using religious beliefs to investigate people to war, brainwashing our youth, who have frequently lost their spiritual essence from which humanity began. What holds the spiritually inclined to religion, whether the one they were born into or one they adopt, is not a desire for dogma, but a deep thirst in many of us to experience the spiritual. I believe that although there are many different religions in the world, spirituality is the same. Terrorism, extremism and intolerance belong to no particular religion and are found often in those who do not subscribe to any religion. I bring to light Carl .G. Jung's belief that "the wars of the world and our untold inhumane treatment of each other are caused not because we are evil (or terrorists), but rather because we have lost touch with who we really are."

The American NGOs fighting for the rights of prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and Batgaram, the British journalist Yvonne Riddley, royalty Princess Diana, Mother Teresa seem to be inspiring the academicians to infuse love and empathy in the youth of the world. The Lyotardian (1984) agenda of post-modern belief in human liberation and pluralism must be upheld as the driving force to save the world. The intellectuals must assume responsibility and work with people. History gives us the role models in the human forms of Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), the intellectuals mentioned in the Bible as prophets, Lord Buddha and

Socrates. The world having lost hope in modernism and postmodernism requires the academics to engage the people. We have an advantage, we are the super power!!!!

3. Recommendations

The masses should be approached at gross root level through electronic and print media to indoctrinate the truth that “tolerance, justice and equality” are the needs of the hour.

Internet is a great resource to unite humanity, caricature of the revered prophets and saints and negative statements about people’s religious values or cultural mores must never be allowed to appear on the internet.

Remember that people need movements and organizations to gravitate to. Constructive change needs that support groups be formed by the intellectuals, around the world.

4. References

- [1] Bakker, C.J Hans, Babeliowsky, Martijn, N.F Stevenaar, Frank J.W. (2004) *The Next Leap, Achieving growth through global networks, partnerships and cooperation*. Great Britain: T J International, Padstow Cornwall.
- [2] Barsamian, David (2003). *The Common Good* -Noam Chomsky interviews. Canada: Odonion Press.
- [3] Emerson, Ralph Waldo, (p 72). *The works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, Volume 1
- [4] Miller, George David, (p 8), *Peace, Value, and Wisdom: The Educational Philosophy of Daisaku Ikeda*.
- [5] Myers, G. David (2002), *Social Psychology* 7th Ed USA Mc Graw Hill Co.
- [6] Schiller, Herbert (1976), *Communication and Cultural Domination*. USA: ME Sharpe Publisher.
- [7] Shaffer, Lawrence (2002) *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Literary Criticism*. India : New Delhi, Sarup and Sons and IVY Publishers.