

General Value System and Cultural Manifestation

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GENERAL VALUE SYSTEM AND CULTURAL MANIFESTATION*

EVER since the mists of antiquity, when man appeared as a user of tools and laid the foundation of a culture distinct from those of other animals, he has been faced with two problems, viz., *control of materials* around him and *control of men*. The former lead to the development of science and technology, and the latter to development of social organization and politics.

Technologically speaking, in the former area, he is now entering a third phase of man the creator. The two earlier phases were firstly of discovery of materials and their limited uses, and secondly large-scale systematic utilisation of mineral and other resources. Today, his technological capabilities are such that he is able to create the necessary materials which he wishes to.

From the point of organization, again, he finds himself in a new phase; starting as a tool operator, he began to operate simple machines of craftsmen, and later a complex of machines in factories. He is now entering a phase of the push button producer.

These changes have had profound effect on the psychology of the individual, as well as on the social organizations engendered by these developments. Both in turn had

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their impact on the values and the resultant culture.

Control of men, though linked up with the various phases of control of materials, brings us directly to the problem of value system and culture based on it. The general value systems which were evolved in different periods of history, to control men and to stabilise social organization, found different cultural expressions in different cultural areas. However, a critical look at the developments of each period may reveal two basic trends, opposing each other; firstly, a general value system aiming at control of men through fear, and secondly management of men through the understanding of social phenomena, based on the methods and techniques in the field of natural phenomena. The former lead to the development of mythologies, deliberate inculcation of superstitions and hierarchical society. The latter, lead to trends in the opposite direction—rejection of mythologies and superstition, creation of scientific understanding of natural as well as social phenomena and equality of men. In the case of Greece these were represented by the Platonic tradition on the one hand and the Ionian on the other, and have been adequately discussed by Farrington in "Science and Politics in Ancient World". Similar trends can also be observed in India, and other countries in antiquity though not analysed adequately. These are represented by the religious philosophies on the one hand and natural philosophies, called the *nastik*, on the other.

The general value system, based on fear promoted through superstitions and codified in myths, presupposes an elite group as a guardian of the system. It is the duty of the elite to enforce the values on the rest of the people. It also requires a definite machinery to enforce it, and is

usually done at two levels—the level of the state, and socially through an established religious order as well as through customs evolved over a period of time. Both aimed at synchronism of human action. While the former achieved it through a command (law), the latter achieved it through voluntary participation. However, in the case of religious movements, with the passage of time, each religion adopted the machinery, similar to that of the state, to enforce its edicts.

Cultural differences, or variation to the same theme, of control of men can often be found in reflecting similar value systems. For instance, in supporting the elite society in ancient Greece, slavery was practised and justified socially as well as biologically. Ancient India on the other hand developed a more subtle and sophisticated form—dividing mankind into castes, and defining the role and position of each caste in the social organization.

However, taking an overview of history, one may notice certain broad features and relations.

In different periods of history, and in different societies, depending upon the technological state of development, i.e. the control of materials, necessary values seem to have developed, or earlier values modified. For instance, in contrast to the general value system of the agricultural societies, those of the industrial revolution had certain distinctive values. To mention a few, competition, merit measured by the success one achieved in ruthless competition, and utilitarianism at the individual level, and national chauvinism, exploitation of resources—of both men and countries, the right of the technologically advanced countries over the technologically weak countries at the social level. To give such a value system a philosophical

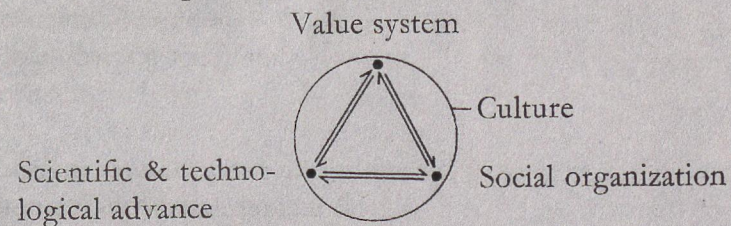
basis the theory of 'survival of the fittest' was developed and the whole process was suggested as natural selection. The culture which emerged and developed as a result was that of rugged individualism and extreme selfishness at a personal level and that of exploitation at a social level, leading to many a crisis up to the present day.

There appears to be a major shift in the value system since the current scientific revolution. Under the impact of undirected scientific and technological development, resulting in environmental pollution, ecological imbalance, drying up of natural resources as a result of their wasteful utilisation, and scientific, and technological imbalance between countries, scientists, and sociologists as well as humanists have begun to look at the situation differently. The resultant thinking has not yet led to the development of general values as yet, but there are indications that it might as indicated by Harvey Brooks in "Science, Growth and Society". The implications and consequences of scientific advance are posing questions, both at social as well as individual levels. One thing is becoming increasingly clear as the situation is developing, and that is: in preference to the individual considerations, social considerations, and in place of narrow national considerations, global considerations are being given greater weight. The situation, as far as one could see, is leading to the emergence of a new set of social and global values, which is likely to mould the behaviour of individuals and thus generate a new culture.

In this context, it is now being increasingly recognized that in a given situation, the freedom is limited to a given set of choices. Each choice entails a series of consequences. It is upto us to weigh the choices and the consequences, and make our decisions. So far in history the choices were

made taking only one factor, economic, social or technical; but the situation which is now emerging necessitates taking into consideration all such factors including moral, ethical and cultural, before judicious decisions could be made. This would lead not only to the development of new methodologies and techniques of doing so, but also to a new value system and culture.

The problem, of a general value system, as suggested above, necessitates an understanding of three areas—scientific and technological advance, social organization, and value system. One could represent it diagrammatically as a triangle, with a two-way traffic in each direction and the entire system in a dynamic equilibrium. The three in this state represent the culture of a period or a country.



For any dynamic culture, not only is there a two-way traffic in each direction, but the feedback has to be effective as well in order to avoid either the atrophy or a crisis in the culture.

This may be evident from two examples.

Any one who is familiar with the philosophy and culture of India would have become aware of the values which seem to dominate its history. These may briefly be stated as:

- (i) Tolerance—leading to co-existence of many religions,
- (ii) Compassion,

(iii) Ahimsa—non-violence as a means of achieving an objective.

These values have led to the state, which is often described as unity in diversity. The leadership of the country ever since the development of the national movement, and the government since independence, aimed at these. Dedicated to the democratic system, it aimed at inculcating amongst the people these values and attempted to develop a culture based on it. However, democracy which allows free play to all forces tended to push other values. The political culture, based on adult franchise, tended to promote linguistic, religious and regional loyalties of a narrow kind, since at least some of the political groups found it easier to appeal to such narrow loyalties to gain ascendancy. Further, when thwarted in their effort, recourse to violence as a means of achieving their ends became only a small step.

Besides the political culture, there is also the pressure of commercial culture. The values of this culture is to gain profit, at the expense of everything. Consequently, using the most sophisticated psychological techniques through mass media, advertising the goods, they aim to undermine any culture other than those which conform to their value system. Any reference to Indian film before and after independence, and the huge advertisements in newspapers (despite paper shortage) would reveal the general culture transformation and the underlying values of this culture.

In the advanced countries, consumerism as a cultural dimension has come to stay. When seen critically, it is essentially a waste of natural resources and productive capacities on the one hand, and living off the resources of under developed countries on the other. Promoted at an individual level it is posing serious problems at a social

level. In order to solve the latter tremendous resources are required, though it would be less expensive and simple to change the value system which seeks to concentrate on the individual instead of meeting the problem socially.

The lopsidedness of the approach is evident from the modern drug industry. A flourishing industry adds to the G.N.P. though it also means that there is something seriously wrong with the health of the people. Further, the prevalent philosophy is one of giving an individual cure, though the problem may be social—e.g. nervous break-downs in advanced countries and epidemics in under-developed countries.

The dichotomy of social aims and objectives, and what emerges as a reality as a result of different social pressures, as seen from the above examples, pose serious questions with regard to social engineering. The relevant problems are connected with the correlation of three sub-systems in a dynamic situation as mentioned earlier: Science and technology, Social organization and Value system. The question which we face is: is it possible to develop an organic inter-linking of the three, with a feedback system, so that any changes in one brings about the necessary correction in the other two?

It may sound naive, if not outlandish, if it was to be suggested that some active consideration be given to develop a science of value system, and a technology to generate these and the necessary culture. There, however, appears to be no escape from it, unless we choose to destroy science and technology, freeze the level of present development, and cut off future possibilities.

In a society which is undergoing a rapid change, however, there is an overburden of values and cultural

forms which are at best irrelevant. No critical analysis of value systems and their cultural forms, and their relevance to the present or the future has been carried out. By not applying the existing knowledge, and the methods and techniques of both analysis and synthesis, to the problem of values and cultural development, we are not only limiting ourselves but also allowing two independent sets of values and cultures in an area which is essentially inter-linked. This is leading to disastrous results.

There is also the problem of promoting the value system to make it a part of general culture. In doing so one has to look carefully into the means used so far. The scientific culture of respect for facts, value of consensus, and knowledge as a basis for decision, necessitates the widest possible dissemination of information, critical analysis of information, and correlation of various factors in a given situation. In order to achieve it, the state machinery which has so far operated through command may not be adequate, but a more organic approach similar to earlier religious movements, with self-imposed discipline and social code of conduct, may require to be developed. This would entail a new dimension in education, both in and out of schools.

For the set of values and their proper operation, to reduce the gulf between what is aimed at and the reality, a necessary feedback system at various levels is required, in order to avoid distortions, and divorce of reality from objectives. The religious movements atrophied since they could not develop the feedback systems and the corrective mechanisms. In a dynamic society which is undergoing rapid change, and with acceleration of change, such a mechanism is essential and the system vital.

Science and technology have emerged as major factors in contemporary society, as instruments of social change as well as creators of a new culture. They have yet to be integrated with the general value system. The integration, however, can only be brought about on the basis of existing knowledge and the methods and techniques now available, as a result of man's quest for knowledge, and in consonance with the social and cultural goals he sets for himself.
