

**G. R. BHATKAL MEMORIAL LECTURE**

**DISILLUSIONMENT AND  
CLARITY**

ACHYUT PATWARDHAN

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## **TRANSACTIONS**

Many valuable lectures are given, papers read and discussed, and oral reviews of outstanding books presented, at the Indian Institute of World Culture. These TRANSACTIONS represent some of these lectures and papers and are printed for wider dissemination in the cause of better intercultural understanding so important for world peace and human brotherhood.

### **TRANSACTION NO 58**

Shri Acyut Patwardhan is a distinguished thinker and leader. He was associated with Gandhiji, in the Indian freedom movement and has been in the fore front of several movements aiming to bring about social change.

Shri Patwardhan was invited on October 28, 1980 to deliver Shri G. R. Bhatkal Memorial Lecture and he chose for his subject, DISILLUSIONMENT AND CLARITY. He contributes several important ideas which need to be carefully considered and discussed.

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## **Disillusionment and Clarity**

by ACHYUT PATWARDHAN

I am thankful to the Bhatkal Memorial Foundation for inviting me to share my thinking with you this evening regarding the serious and pervasive crisis through which we are passing. In each country of the world the people are far more concerned with their immediate problems. Just as we are disturbed by the worsening situation created by the inflation, rising prices, and lowered productivity particularly in respect of coal and electricity, which is further aggravated by the escalation of oil prices throughout the world. This Energy crisis also puts added strains on our industrial and agricultural productivity. It must also be noted that certain sections of the trading community and certain sectors of organized industrial labour are failing to accept their social responsibility to the vulnerable and not well organized sections among the low-income group of citizens. We are also facing a situation in which respect for law and social order is under a severe strain and levels of civic and political behaviour have markedly declined. This moral degeneration is a far graver challenge than the economic crisis, the dislocation of the educational system or even political instability.

The net result of these various social trends is expressed through a mood of disillusionment which is eroding the normal healthy urges to action, thwarting a more dynamic effort radically to change the conditions which breed disorder and insecurity. It would be perhaps a constructive exercise to explore the significance of this prevailing climate of disillusionment and find out if the mind can be cleansed of confusion and loss of direction so that it can discover within itself the clarity which helps a more constructive and critical outlook, and action. You cannot sell a programme of action to a man whose creativity is sapped by despair or cynicism. What one can however attempt to do is to examine critically and sanely why man the world over has brought himself to this predicament. Especially in an age when man's command over the forces of nature was never as near-complete as at present, why does man lack the wisdom and farsight to utilize his vast powers to bring into being a society of men and women who are pledged to establish a world order in which the potential goodness and benevolence which is the heritage of every man and woman can be nourished and harnessed for peace on earth and goodwill to all, especially to the retarded sections of the human race.<sup>1</sup>

This problem must not be treated as a metaphysical speculation, an academic abstraction or a pious generalization, as it is vitally related to man's survival and well-being in the epoch of super technology. It is not a crisis restricted to one country but events are forcing upon us the recognition that whether you live in the affluent or the impoverished sector geographically, whether you are living in the Communist world or the so-called Democratic society, whether you live in China or Canada, in Brazil or Algeria, whether you are a Hindu or an atheist this challenge does not lose the edge of its confrontation. It is an equally urgent problem which earnest men and women cannot afford to brush away under the carpet. I have no panacea or ready answer and I hope we shall be able to start an

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture delivered at the Indian Institute of World Culture, Bangalore on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1980.

intelligent search for the direction in which we may discern a way to cleanse the mind of confusion so that we have the clarity to analyze why we feel disillusioned. Tim word is significant because *you have to see your own house of illusions before you can grasp the nature of your own disillusionment.*

I propose to examine critically some of the assumptions and postulates that sustained my generation and the pattern of our motivations) which helped us to lead reasonably useful lives for man in society. As a previous generation of men and women who renounced the world and took the ocre-robe, we were exhorted to turn our energies and attention to single simple goal—the ending of British domination and restoring to the people of this land the fullest sovereignty over the task of shaping their own destiny. It was indeed a simplistic yet exhilarating experience to live with an over-simplified creed Disease; poverty, unemployment, economic backwardness, ignorance, ill-health etc. Cause British Rule? You end the cause and the disease ends almost automatically. That was the implicit assumption which we believed, lived and propagated for nearly, two decades. We knew we would be faced with the cumulative tasks and stupendous challenges but we were confident that our country had the resources and capabilities to cope with the multiple challenges.

Over thirty years later we have lost our 'elan' and there is a mood of dejection and even annoyance among the angry young men for being led to a no-man's land of stagnation and worse.

We have to take note of this crisis of frustrated aspirations-. However we must also set this situation in its right perspective if we are not to be lost again in some equally fallacious facile make-belief.

In the first place let us take note of the fact that the conflict in Iraq and Iran, the Russian tanks in Kabul and American Hostages in Teheran, the tragedy of Kampuchia and the famine raging in Uganda and Sudan and the much talked of trial of the Gang of Four in China, are indications that the crisis we face has global dimensions. It is not possible to close our eyes to the fact that super technology developed during the past fifty years has made human survival and prosperity totally indivisible so it is no more possible to look for and work for a purely national solution without taking cognizance of its global dimension. "Global issues can be solved only by global concerted action" this wise statement of an eminent Italian Social Engineer is too often ignored by those who hold our political destiny in their hands. Yet our educated men and women in the USA as in Russia, in Europe as in China or Japan, in India or Pakistan are all reared and educated with a nationalist ethnocentric and often a chauvenist bias. With minds that are thus chained to regional perspectives it is not easy to recognize and cast away these blinkers and preferences which only add fuel to world wide tensions and conflicts.

Our universities have ceased to impart truly Universalist perspectives. They have become — the best of them — guilds of specialists who may undertake inter-disciplinary studies from time to time. But the explosion of knowledge and fast pace of invention and research forces each scientist and researcher to cultivate his own field of specialization. These specialists tend to become blind to the social consequences and implications of their specialized work and thus become unwitting tools in the hands of the State which often finances their researches. Their knowledge is thus placed in the hands of men who do not possess any deep commitment to the total well-being of man all the world over.

The appalling and diabolical stock-piles of atomic chemical and biological weapons of destruction which the State accumulates are only proof that many scientists are totally blind

to their obligations to ensure that, knowledge does not become a curse to man's survival and prosperity. When a young generation of boys and girls see this phenomenon of science placing itself at the mercy of an a-moral apparatus of destruction they are horrified by the threat to human well-being and the squandering of billions of dollars as resources which could be far more usefully diverted to the urgent needs of men and women in the so-called technologically backward regions.

In this context we must note that for the past two hundred years or more modern man has set upon the adventure to *conquer* the laws of nature so that the avoidable misery of starvation, disease, exploitation and ignorance may be ended. As a consequence man has placed himself in a totally harmful relationship to nature. For one thing resources have become much more valuable and important and they are chased with zest in the so-called backward regions. Thus Zaire meant copper and uranium for the Belgians in Congo for decades. South America stands in a similar relationship to North American multinationals and Russia has a similar policy towards her Balkan and Asian zones of hegemony and power. The consequent devaluation of man and the problem of the misuse of resources creates two major evils which have brought human existence in jeopardy. They are Pollution and Alienation.

Pollution is the result of the flagrant continued misuse of resources and is now a commonly accepted problem growing in the wake of industrialization. For instance, the pollution of the Ganges has made the sacred waters almost unpotable at Varanasi.

When man works in the techno-scientific frame work of modern industrialized society he is only a replicable part of a giant machine and shares many of the mechanical characteristics of specialized machine parts. The NASA created an organization with a team of three hundred thousand scientists each equipped with a specific machine located all over the world to feed information to the computers from where it was collated and relayed to the astronauts. This is only a rather obvious illustration to indicate industrial man's relationship to his work and his fellow workers. This inevitably creates a human jungle — in which physical proximity in the tenements and work-shops is denuded of any personal relationship. This is where man remains a stranger even if he goes to the same work-shop, shares the same housing complex, sees the same cinema shows, eats in the same restaurant etc. This alienation of man from man was considered by Marx to be characteristic of private ownership of public resources. However fifty years of Russian experience has proved this as the common occupational disease of all industrial societies.

In such a society man feels a sense of privation which is psychological rather than material. He wants companionship, the meeting of minds, a sense of kinship which is causeless and he gets good clothes, shelter, medicine, education and regimented entertainment minus this feeling of kinship. It is this factor of degeneration which is the undoing and disintegrating feature of industrial societies,

In the pre-industrial society man lived in harmony with nature. *Conquest of Nature was a wrong turning on the road to man's material development.* The lack of harmony with nature makes man look upon all other arti-facts of nature as tools for his own power—profit and pleasure. Unless man rediscovers his harmony with nature and learns to work with it — pollution must increasingly endanger man's well-being on this planet. Pollution has its origin in the human mind. Unless- the mind of man is fully putted of its indiscriminate greed and hate, unless man awakens to his kinship to all life, his heart and mind cannot be cleansed of pollution. Unless man learns to value the safety and well-being of his fellow-

men as much as his own his mind cannot be pure.

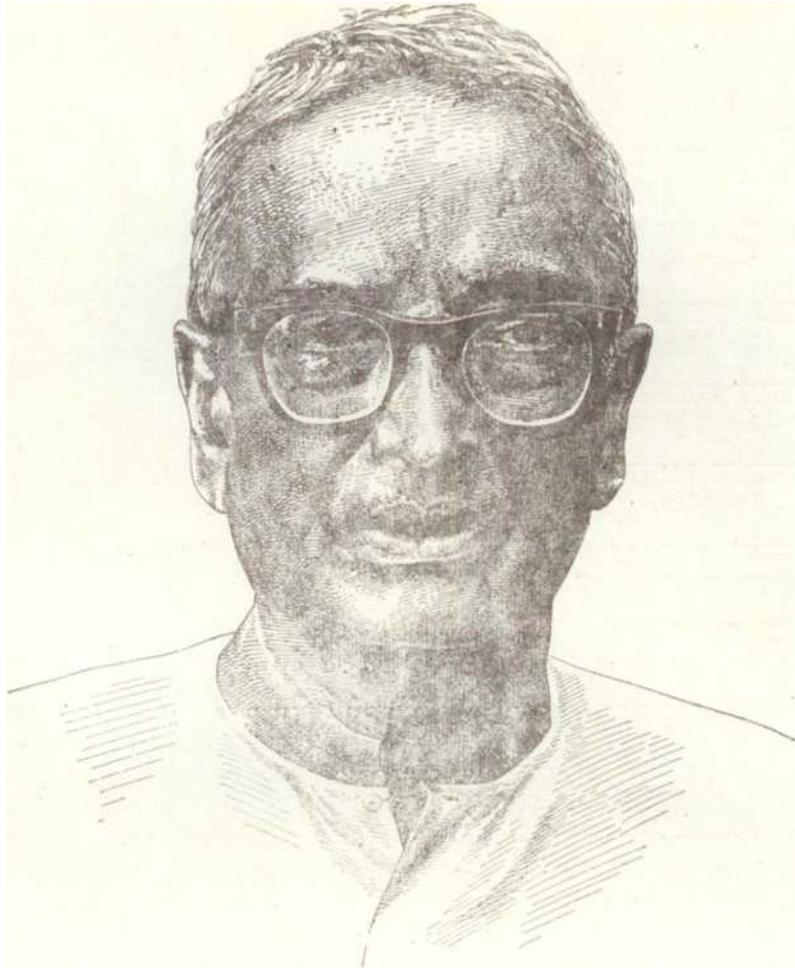
Basic to this analysis in which war and the manufacture of armaments are an accepted part of human activity we must recognize there is no way to outline any social or collective solutions to man's growing burden of self-made misery whether through pollution, alienation, conflicts or through dissipation as a means of escape from the boredom of mediocrity and a mechanical life-style. The earnest and thoughtful man must first disengage himself from loyalties and psychological entanglement in that part of the State's administration which is perfected for purposes of war. National Defense is a prestigious word which covers many heinous sins and crimes; but we must critically probe all that is done in the name of Defence and totally free ourselves from this suicidal mis-adventure within every nation.

We have dwelt somewhat disproportionately on the facts that make for disillusionment and frustration, only to lay bare the anatomy of illusions that proliferate in the modern society; man feels himself ineffective and socially insignificant except when he is operating as a meaningful participant of a 'System'. "Organization man" is man who feels tremendously important and capable as a member of a system — whether of the Left or the Right, with a specific expertise and aim and a material objective. Man *per se* feels lost in such a society unless he can control machines and or men behind the machines.

This alienation which society imposes upon man can be grasped by a faculty hardly noticed — Every man and woman is endowed with it as a birth-right but society is making him forget that he has any such faculty — that faculty is ATTENTION, With attention any man can become aware of his thoughts and desires, his tendencies and reactions, his habits and cravings. He can learn to observe how he breathes whether he sits in a correct posture. He can observe if his recreations leave him dull and deflated or if they bring him relaxation and renewal.

The best way to attain clarity of perception is to re-establish one's close association with nature. The sky and the clouds, the hills and jungles, the farms and herds of cattle, bird-watching or observing the waxing and waning of the moon and sun-rise and sun-set, the cycle of the seasons all these other glimpses of nature bring to man a kinship with all life. Then alone man realizes his place in the eco-system not as a Ruler but an intelligent participant of an infinite and vast process. The world was not made for Man alone — when man awakens to his kinship with the insect world as well as the stars, all creation there arises within him a sense of the sanctity of all life. Unless one sees that you cannot harm another without harming yourself, you are not awake to the interdependence of all life. Then the stars have a new mystery to share with you at nights and solitude brings you closer to your fellow-man. Clarity is the first step towards man's understanding of his own place in the scheme of existence. Death is a part of this scheme so he is no more afraid of death.

Clarity is the triumph of attention as the light that guides one's steps in the midst of the prevailing conflicts and confusion. Disillusion can give place to clarity only when we know the nature of the illusions and hopes, that have held us in their hypnotic spell in search of pleasure and permanence.



GANESH RAMRAO BHATKAL (1896-1972) devoted sixty plus years to promotion of knowledge and in serving several philanthropic causes.

He organized and guided many social and cooperative institutions working for the alleviation of the distressed—specially the needy students, the helpless old and the unfortunate infirm. His help was available to many a willing youth wanting better education and several persons venturing to set up new enterprises.

His dedication to duty, simplicity, humility, honesty, generosity and love of fellow-men endeared him to colleagues in the book industry which he led during the entire second quarter of the century. Founder of Popular Book Depot he built the Institution as a public service devoted to advancement of learning.

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