

THE BAHUDHĀ APPROACH:
A PATH TOWARDS A HARMONIOUS WORLD¹

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I

The Beginning

In a poem entitled *The Sunset of the Century* written on the last day of the 19th century, the famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote: “the last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red clouds of the West and the whirlwind of hatred.” The mood on the last day of the 20th century, however, was one of hope. Many viewed the conclusion of the Cold War as the end of major conflicts in global politics and the emergence of a harmonious world. This expectation was short-lived.

In the morning of 11th September, 2001 as the aircraft flown by Al-Qaeda attacked USA’s World Trade Center at New York, Pentagon—its defence headquarters in Washington DC; and in the plains of Pennsylvania—a new era began. The attack lasted just 102 hours but heralded an era that has forced a more realistic appreciation of the world.

It firmly established that religiously motivated violence will pose a major threat to world peace. It became a landmark not only in the lives of those who were physically affected and had barely survived but also of numerous others including myself. The response of individuals, however, varied.

Ten days later on September 21, 2001 President George W. Bush in his address to the American people declared America’s commitment “to the destruction and to the defeat of the global terror network” and went on to assert “every nation in every region now has a decision to make: either you are with us or you are with the terrorists.” Soon commenced the military attack on Afghanistan. The regime change in Afghanistan was followed by invasion of Iraq and more recently the entry of the US navy seal in Abbottabad in Pakistan on 1st May, 2011

¹ This monograph is based on Maulana Azad Memorial Lecture 2011 organized by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations, New Delhi that I delivered on 11/11/2011 and my book *Bahudhā and the Post 9/11 World* published in 2008 by Oxford University Press. [Editor’s note: although not delivered at the *Science, Spirituality and Education* conference, this article is included in this collection because of its relevance to general theme of the present volume.]

leading to capture and killing of Osama bin-Laden, the leader of Al-Qaeda.

Persons like the young musician P.J. Harvey reacted in a different manner. Polly composed some memorable lyrics including the famous “the mess that we’re in and the city sun sets over me.” My own reaction was somewhat different and needs to be narrated.

At the time of this catastrophe, I was Executive Director of the World Bank, at Washington DC. In the aftermath of the tragedy, it became fashionable for every think-tank to discuss two questions: ‘What went wrong?’ and ‘Why people hate us (Americans)?’ I happened to attend one such meeting during September itself. The gathering was impressive, I was seated almost opposite the Chairperson. The guest speaker had concluded on the somber note of the need for building a coalition of nations against terrorism. He also spoke of the radicalization of Islam, values of religious pluralism, and the need for tolerance. The presentation over, the Chairperson asked for comments and looked at me. She said that India may have the answer in view of its heritage of pluralism and originality of mind, and gave me the floor. I was not prepared. I recall having said then that “while India may have the answer, I do not” and went on to narrate my experiences in handling terrorism in India. I was aware of the inadequacy of my response. For the real question was: What could we do to achieve harmony in a world so globalized, yet with nations so unequal, living in mutual distrust, fear and worse terror?

Since then I have been contemplating this theme with a view to explore an enduring framework for a global public policy—a policy for harmony among different people and societies in the post 9/11 world as seen through the lens of the Indian experience.

The Bahudhā Approach

I would like to call the approach I am suggesting *Bahudhā*. This comes from my personal attachment to an attitude that has greatly contributed to the enrichment of harmonious life in India: ‘respect for another person’s view of truth with hope and belief that he or she may be right.’ This is best expressed in the Rigvedic hymn that enjoins:

Ekam Sad Vipra Bahudhā Vadanti

The Real is one, the learned speak of it variously

Etymologically speaking, the word *Bahudhā* is derived from the word *bahu*, and *dha* is suffixed to it to make it an adverb. So, what does

Bahudhā mean? *Bahu* denotes many ways or parts or forms or directions. It is used to express manifoldness, much, and repeatedly. When the word is used with the root *kri*, it means to make manifold or multiply. *Bahudhā* is also used as an expression of intermittent continuity in various time frames. It is used to express frequency, as in 'time and again'. *Bahudhā* suggests an eternal reality or continuum, a dialogue of harmony, and peaceful living in society.

Pluralism could be the closed equivalent to *Bahudhā* in the English language. Pluralism has been described in various ways in history, sociology, and politics—cultural pluralism, political pluralism, and pluralistic societies. Pluralism has also been seen in the context of the co-existence of nation-state and ethnicity, equality and identity issues.

The *Bahudhā* approach recognizes that there is a distinction between plural societies and pluralism. Pluralism is an inevitable ingredient of democratic societies. The role of religion, language, and ethnicity is very significant in plural societies. Pluralism in this context is an imperative for both developed and developing societies.

Pluralist societies are necessarily multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multilingual societies. In such societies, there are various boundaries: racial, linguistic, religious, and at times even ideological. The *Bahudhā* approach does not believe in annexation or transgression of boundaries or assimilation of identities and propagation of a simplistic world view. It merely facilitates dialogue and thereby promotes understanding of the collective good. The realization of one's own identity may sustain boundaries and yet, at the same time, understanding of other identities may help formulate a public policy of harmony. The *Bahudhā* approach is conscious of the fact that societies without boundaries are not possible.

The culture of *Bahudhā* is deeply rooted in the inculcation of a special attitude from an early age. Dialogue requires a state of mind where one can strongly believe in one's own way of looking at issues while simultaneously accommodating another's point of view. It is this mental discipline that makes one willing to consider the validity of other person's view point.

In short, the *Bahudhā* approach is both a celebration of diversity and an attitude of mind that respects another person's point of view. Democracy and dialogue are central to this approach.

Diversity celebrates different religions, gods and goddesses and belief systems. It also promotes a feeling that the world would be a dull and over-uniform place if there was only one religion, one god, one language, one folklore and one folktale. The human species cannot be

all of one belief or faith or system—humanity is diversity—something we too often forget.

The inculcation of attitude of mind inspired by the *Bahudhā* approach would mean that one hears others in a manner that is akin to our behavior with family members or with our neighbours. This could help us appreciate and even adopt good practices and value systems of others without diminishing our own.

How is *Bahudhā* relevant in terms of formulation of public policy of harmony in our modern world?

II

The World We Live in

It is imperative to realize that global politics is rapidly changing both in its character and content. The era of rational behaviour on the part of nation-states which was the main objective of the world order set up by the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 no longer holds good. Between the Russian revolution in 1917 and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, even reign of ideologies has been replaced by market interests and individual and group emotions in international relations. People as well as nation-states are increasingly getting conscious of their identities and their place in the world.

At the risk of over-simplification, the vital question in this changed world is ‘How should we live?’

In this broad context, the relevance of *Bahudhā* approach in the contemporary world could be viewed in the context of a series of interrelated happenings such as globalization and its discontents; the yearning for freedom and hope for a decent livelihood among youth; the increasing importance of religion in human affairs; and the rise of terrorism caused by and/or accompanied with a sense of fear, revenge and humiliation.

Globalization and its Discontents

Globalization, the new international system, has integrated markets, nation-states and technologies to a degree never before witnessed. This new process is enabling individuals, corporations and countries to reach around the world further, faster, deeper and cheaper. It is true that globalization has, in many ways, strengthened the hold of the United States of America- the sole super power after 1991- over the rest of the world. The recent rise of Asia, particularly of India and China, in

recent years as economic powers, however, is gradually challenging the Western pre-dominance in the world.

In a globalized world the poor are no longer ignorant of the world of the rich. The rich can no longer ignore the tragedies of people of Asia, Africa and Latin America for this could adversely affect them.

The Arab Spring

Today, there is lot of hope in the Arab world. The changes that began in the first year of the second decade of the twenty-first century in the Arab World constituted a titanic movement in history. It reminded one of the nature of changes that were set into motion in the last decade of the twentieth century that commenced with the fall of Berlin Wall, dissolution of the Soviet Empire and democratic freedom for the east European countries.

The ‘Jasmine Revolution’ of January, 2011 in Tunisia—so named in view of the pride of place that jasmine occupies in Tunisian society was filled with talk of democracy and freedom. It was facilitated by use of the mobile phone, the Internet, Facebook and Twitter- the new instruments placed in the hands of youth by Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution. Egypt and several other Arab countries including Yemen, Syria and Libya followed suit. The massive and spontaneous nature of street-protests posed decisive challenge to the rule of autocrats and dictators. It was a huge reaction against rulers who were stealing wealth of the community and depriving people of their freedom.

In future, it may well that the Arab World would be ruled by democratically elected leaders. The Arabs will exercise their rights to regime change as in European countries, the US and India. It will, however, take time for democratic institutions like the legislature, the judiciary, the media and the election commission to acquire firm roots and autonomous and independent character.

In a globalized world, the youth are nurturing hope based on doing better in this world here and now. They are no longer believers in fate nor do they entertain the belief in some future better world, either on earth or in heaven.

Religious Revival

The world is also witnessing a revival of religions as never before in recent times. There is a revivalist movement among believers in Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Shinto, and Judaism. There are

signs that many Chinese and Russians are returning to religion. Fundamentalist Islam is asserting itself even among the westernized middle classes of Turkey and Egypt.

Religious resurgence is primarily a reaction to the loss of personal identity and group stability produced by the process of social, economic, and cultural modernization that swept across the world in the second half of the twentieth century. In the second half of the twentieth century economic and social modernization became global in scope. With the rapid decline in traditional systems of authority, some people get separated from their roots in a bewildering maze of new rules and expectations. Such people need new sources of identity, new forms of stable community, and new sets of moral precepts to provide them with a sense of meaning and purpose. Organized religious groups, both mainstream and radical, are growing today precisely to meet these needs. It has pervaded 'every continent, every civilization, and virtually every country'.

Privatization of Violence and Terrorism

Terrorism, including human bombs, is the latest instrument in violent conflicts that are being sanctioned in the name of redressal of religious and ethnic grievances. The story of the Al-Qaeda as a terrorist organization is 'the story of eccentric and violent ideas sprouting in the fertile ground of political and social turmoil'. Islamists believe that 'war on terror' is just a western euphemism for 'war on Islam'. The concerned citizens in different continents are asking: How to stop this cycle of violence that is leading to more violence and suffering?

Today, the spectre of a nuclear holocaust can no longer be dismissed as wild imagination. There is no road map with the United Nations for achieving nuclear disarmament in a time-bound universal, non-discriminatory, phased and verifiable manner. On the other hand, the fact that some 'rogue' nations are already in possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), only fuels this growing sense of insecurity. In a way, globalization has aided the expansion of a global terror network. There is now constant sharing of intelligence and technology between different terror outfits around the world. The porous borders, meant to allow free trade, are being exploited by terrorists to carry out subversive activities.

The privatization of violence through terrorism poses a major challenge. Invisible nature of the terrorist threat is a factor that is contributing a sense of insecurity and fear particularly among the rich and the middle class.

Humiliation and Hope

The world is also being guided by a sense of Humiliation and by a sense of Hope. Humiliation is the injured confidence of people and the nation-states when they come to believe that for no fault of theirs they were/are badly treated and that their physical and human resources were/are exploited by a few powerful countries and companies.

On the other side of spectrum, there are several countries where people and particularly the boys and girls are hopeful for their future. They are confident that the future belongs to them and that they will be able to realize their potential in their life-time and leave a better future for their children and grand-children.

The free flow of goods, ideas and technology is being accompanied by rapid rise of a sense of humiliation and other identity related issues. People are increasingly viewing their identity not only in terms of nation-states to which they belong, but also as members of their religious, racial, and ethnic groups. Such consciousness of one's heritage and a sense of pride in it gives them satisfaction. Yet, concurrently, a lack of understanding of and with other members of society about economic opportunities, political rights, and religious sensibilities provides grounds for discord and often degenerates into violence.

Intolerance is on the rise. In spite of the fact that we live in an information age, we do not understand the aspirations and beliefs of other people adequately. Instead, we insist upon images and data that obscure rather than illuminate our vision. On the other hand, the world is growing more complex and individuals, nations and cultures are showing increasing concerns about their identities. All these impact on international politics.

There is something coarse, and at times extremely cruel, in our behavior towards each other. Social and religious resentment accompanied by economic inequality and the exploitation of deprived individuals and backward nations has the propensity to create lasting disturbances in the world. Above all, the problem of terrorism and the ecology crisis call for augmentation of our dialogue processes and enhancement of cooperation skills. It is very evident that the direction of world affairs, unless significantly changed, will bring disaster and tragedy of untold perceptions.

Need for Change and Bahudhā Approach

So we need a new kind of world to be constructed by people, states, and religious communities. Perhaps, the major world religions could seize the opportunities provided by globalization to transform their messages and reach out to a new global audience. Faith informs the daily struggles of millions in confronting larger political conflicts regarding democracy, human rights, and economic development.

In the circumstances, our perception as well as our approach needs to change radically to avoid collapse of the existing international order. This is both for self-preservation and collective survival. The emotional frontier is becoming as important as our geographical frontiers. A tolerant world calls for appreciation of differences and similarities of others with one's values and belief systems. The *Bahudhā* approach is needed both for understanding of other societies and peoples and for living in harmony. How do we secure these?

III

How to Secure Bahudhā

The *Bahudhā* approach could be secured particularly through (i) religious harmony; (ii) educational programming; (iii) strengthening of international political architecture: the United Nations; and (iv) the use of military power in terms of the UN Charter.

Relevance of Religion

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the famous German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) made an astounding statement declaring the 'death of God'. Advances in science and technology gave human beings new powers of control over the forces of nature and that, in turn, led several writers and thinkers to declare their independence from God. The Age of Reason had dawned and started asserting itself.

By the end of the twentieth century, however, religion began to re-assert itself and began to influence world events. Politicians, journalists, and scholars started realizing and often exploiting the extremely powerful value of the religious motives of citizens and the need to use their beliefs in the promotion of development, peace and happiness in society.

Simultaneously, religions also witnessed the rise of fundamentalist groups in their midst. Jewish fundamentalists, Hindu radicals, angry Buddhist monks, Christian rightists, and Muslim fundamentalists started catching news headlines. The rise of Islamist elements among believers of Islam, in particular, received extraordinary notice in the West and people began expressing their worldview in terms of civilizational clash between Islam and Christianity.

Culture, theology and territory are linking global and local religious identities as globalization is changing the very nature of religion and its role in international affairs.

Globalization is also making religion more pluralistic. It is felt that the kind of religious monopolies that have benefited the formalized churches in central Europe, the Catholic Church in Latin America, and Hinduism in India will be difficult to sustain. Religion is increasingly, if unevenly, becoming a matter of choices about whether to believe, whether to embrace one particular kind of religion, and, if so, what elements or sect of that religion to embrace.

In coming decades religion is likely to make increasing impact upon and even alter relations of the nation-states in several parts of the world. At a basic level, religion will be an important factor in understanding the general foreign policy orientations of many countries.

Religion is a potent force. As an agent for the generation of peace and happiness, it facilitates goodwill among people, and helps them to lead a life of spirituality and fulfillment. In recent years, people like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King have used it for achieving justice and freedom. Swami Vivekananda and Mother Teresa were inspired by their religious faiths to serve the poor, the derelict, and the discarded. It is religious faith which has driven the Dalai Lama to propagate the message of love and peace not only among his Tibetan people (including those living in exile in India) but also in distant lands.

The re-assertion of religion in public affairs has also revived the traditional belief that 'my religion is the best'. Identifying religion with dogmas and beliefs had led to several wars in the past and inflicted sufferings on fellow citizens has began receding inhuman consciousness. Several questions are being asked: what is the political role of religion? How does it affect state policy? What is our religious experience?

The well-known Sufi poet Maulana Jalaluddin Rumi beautifully enunciates the Islamic faith when he writes, "The lamps are different

but the light is the same: it comes from beyond.” There are similar expressions in other religions as well. Such ideas strengthen the logic that there can be salvation outside the church or the synagogue, outside the temple or the sangh, and outside the mosque or the gurudwara. Even under the guidance of the same scripture, different communities have developed different ways of worship and communion with the creator. This, in turn, has created manifold forms of religious dialogues and forms of worship.

What we need is a synthesis of these values-spiritual and moral as well as intellectual-with the aim of producing a fully integrated human being. Such an individual would be both inward looking as well as outward looking, who searches his own mind in order that his nobler self may prevail at all times, and at the same time recognize his obligations to his fellow men and the world around him.

Education

Education has a central role to play in building a harmonious society. Education must begin at home as it is here that intolerance towards other faiths has its origins. We know that it is not only love and compassion but also hatred and intolerance that are widespread. Just as people can be taught to hate, they can also learn to treat others with love, dignity and respect. In fact, the issue of public policy of harmony is critically linked with education.

There is an urgent need to focus on the educational curriculum in order to purge it of content that spreads hatred and/or distorts history. Effective education also demands the development of a creative mind and scientific temper.

Utilizing education as an instrument of harmony is not an easy task. The educational curriculum, in particular, has become in several countries an ideological battleground. The interpretation of historical events often excites religious and ethnic groups who start taking positions that are not always rational. Yet, education is the most dependable resource for preparing the youth for initiating dialogue.

We have to look beyond the events that have characterized the global scene since 9/11. Two aspects of education would, however, remain paramount. First, education must strive to create in young minds a willingness to tolerate differences of opinion and the desire to understand different points of view. Second, the massive progress in science and technology has tended to stress the intellectual rather than moral and spiritual values.

Societies marked by a continuing intolerant ethos, in which religious or ethnic groups blindly espouse their narrowest possible perceptions, education can play a role. Patience and time are needed for education to play its expected meaningful role in bringing peace and harmony in the world. The biggest positive factor is that despite all odds youth in many parts of the world are full of hope.

The International Political Architecture: The United Nations

Resolving conflict, however, goes much beyond education. Towards this end, the UN has to be strengthened in terms of its Charter so that it becomes an effective conflict resolution organization. The global political order must reflect the best interests, rules, and practices that states hold in common.

As we look towards the future, it appears that the prevailing nation-state system would continue to be a primary structure. An international order based on the rule of law and consent of nation-states can alone be an effective conflict resolution mechanism.

The UN is the best forum for generation of understanding among nation-states in the realm of politics and economy. It can also be a forum where dialogue among nations can be initiated and sustained. Such dialogues can support efforts towards peace and attempts to resolve conflicts between groups and nations.

The UN needs to be re-organized in several ways: by expanding the Security Council to reflect present day political and economic realities and by funding a permanent peacekeeping force.

Conflict also arises from the growing economic inequality in the world. It is true that the economic progress the world has accomplished during the last fifty years is higher than any in previous periods in history. We are living in a world where the global economy generates over \$60 trillion a year. And yet, nearly one billion people in developing countries live on less than one dollar a day. In this inequitable world, less than twenty percent of the people control eighty percent of the income and resources of the globe. This inequality is likely to increase in view of demographic expansion. Five hundred years ago, the population of the world was about 500 million. The demographic scene has undergone dramatic transformation since then. On 31st October, 2011, we celebrated the arrival of the seven billionth baby in India and in other parts of the world. By 2050, the world's population will increase to 9.1 billion people, and virtually all the population growth will be in the developing world, especially in the fifty poorest countries.

An empowered Economic and Social Security Council would also enable the UN to play a more effective role in reforming the global economic and financial system, represented by the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. This could enable all nations including the advanced industrial countries a co-operative role in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Use of Force

A question is often posed about the role and relevance of the military in the construction of an environment for creative dialogue among civilizations. In the post 9/11 world, it is quite obvious that the ugly face of terrorism has given full justification for a strong military posture by Governments. In fact, the rise of terrorist activities in different parts of the world demands it. It, however, does not mean that military intervention can be taken in an arbitrary fashion.

In this context, the theory of preventive war enunciated by the United States in its National Security Document of September 2002 explicitly defining its unilateralist approach to terrorism needs to be examined. The UN Charter calls upon member states to attempt to settle disputes peacefully - failing that, to make reference to the Security Council for appropriate action including use of military force in terms of Article 51. The categorical position emerging out of Article 51 is that states refrain from the use of military till an armed attack takes place. This has been repeatedly violated but it needs to be respected for building a harmonious world.

Fortunately, the National Security Strategy announced by the White House in May 2010 does not talk about unilateralism in international affairs in the manner President Bush had prescribed in 2002. This is a significant and welcome departure—a step forward towards rule of law in international relations.

It is obvious but needs to be stated that in the task of updating the current architecture of international institutions, which are so out of alignment with the modern world, no state is in such an advantageous position to promote institutional shifts as the United States.

Rebuilding a New Global Order

There are two other significant aspects of re-building a new global order.

First, the tragedy of 9/11, followed by terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament and in Madrid, London, Chechnya, Jammu and Kashmir,

Bali and Mumbai has erected new walls. The walls built are not physical walls but a reflection of mind-walls. It is imperative to pull down these mind-walls in order to build a harmonious world.

Second, in re-building international institutions we need to be guided by an Idealism that accords each nation-state a place under the new sun commensurate with its political and economic strength. This is best expressed by Nagarjuna, the Hindi poet, when he sings:

नये गगन में नया सूर्य तो चमक रहा है,
ये विशाल भूखंड आज तो दमक रहा है,
मेरी भी आभा है उसमें ।

The sun that is shinning on the new sky,
The earth that has acquired the fresh glow,
Contains my light as well,

IV

The Path Ahead

Although civilizations, like other human creations, are mortal, they also evolve, survive and adapt through re-shaping their enduring ideas and values. The four prominent civilizations which embrace an overwhelmingly large segment of the global population are: Indian or Indic, Chinese, Islamic, and Western. The *Bahudhā* approach of ‘one truth, many interpretations’ has been an important feature of the higher forms of every civilization.

Human nature will continue to be a balance of opposites: love and hatred, peace and violence, truth and falsehood, unselfishness and self-centredness, saintliness and sinfulness, and the spiritual and the physical. In fact, these opposite traits are closely connected to one another. The greatness of the human mind lies in building a system that is inclusive and judicious and one that ensures dialogue among persons, groups and nations. Towards this end, religion and spirituality, education and culture, and global political and economic institutions have major roles to play.

In a world of different civilizations each will have to learn to co-exist with the others. What ultimately counts for many people is not political ideology or economic interest. Faith and family, blood and belief, are what people identify with and what they will fight and die for. The question is: Should we allow the clash of civilizations to replace the Cold War as the central phenomenon of global politics?

While fundamentalist religious forces are likely to continue to dominate political discourse for some time to come, it is not likely to be a permanent feature of the world social and political order. Fundamentalism cannot satisfy growing human aspirations or meet the challenges of modernization. Thus, the present hold of extremist organizations over its followers in the Islamic world and elsewhere should gradually loosen and eventually recede.

My sense of optimism and confidence that nation-states would cooperate in elimination of terrorist violence make me believe that the menace of terrorism in its present form would become a thing of the past in the coming decades. But this is not inevitable. The state-system, civil society organizations and concerned citizens have to take stronger action against terrorism. As I look into the future, other challenges - of removal of poverty, disease, illiteracy and inequality - will, however, persist in the 21st century.

The movements towards democracy, religious harmony, and good education need not be viewed as separate ideals or goals; these are interrelated. Creative minds, civil society institutions, and the global political architecture need to have a unity of purpose. The future of harmonious living demands sharing of a perspective that accommodates different points of view and respect for the ideals of *Bahudhā*.

Simultaneously, we have to discard the ideas like ‘my god is superior to yours’, ‘teaching hatred can secure national integrity’, ‘using terrorist groups in pursuit of national goals’ and dismantle infrastructure that ‘breeds hatred and imparts training for terrorist acts’.

Amidst all this, our task is to move collectively as human beings towards peaceful and harmonious living that demands both rationality and love. On our generation rests the responsibility to provide these elements.

There are enormous challenges in removing poverty and building an equitable social order. Fear of violence, terrorism, and the revival of the balance of power philosophy that caused conflicts and wars in the past, persist. I believe that civilizations do not clash, savagery does. Viciousness, duplicity and lack of trust can only be addressed through a dialogic approach and by cultivating an attitude of mind that embraces both listening and recognition of truths other than one’s own.

In our current global society, it is no longer possible to lead an isolated life. People of different faiths and belief live together. It is, therefore, necessary to understand each other’s needs, aspirations, faiths, and belief practices. We have to learn to live together in

concord in spite of traditional differences of religion, civilization, nationality, class, and race. To accomplish this, we have to know each other, which include knowing each other's past. We must learn to recognize and, as far as possible, understand the different cultural configurations in which human nature has expressed itself through indifferent religions, civilizations and nationalities.

Should we not make *Bahudhā* a global creative venture - a cornerstone of liberal democracy and a plural world? Such questions need to be asked and answered. It is no surprise to me that I found the best answers in age-old knowledge systems, because people of goodwill have invested intellectual and spiritual energies in constructing them throughout history, both in India but in other parts of the world as well.

At the End

The study of society and the behaviour of people has always fascinated me. I am aware that both peace and conflict characterize humanity and also the fact that ideas do influence the course of history. My approach to history and politics is based on my deep optimism that the world must and could be improved.

The commitment of people to the idea of peace and the concept of concord is the pre-requisite for achieving harmonious society. The renowned German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) wrote in 1795 essay *Perpetual Peace* that we have to work for avoiding 'a war of extermination' and for establishment of 'a state of peace'. He opined that social harmony would emerge either by human insight or by conflict of a catastrophe of magnitude that would give humanity no other choice. In other words, at this time in our history we have to choose between 'clash of civilizations' and '*Bahudhā*'. The choice is ours.

