



BRAHMA KUMARIS WORLD SPIRITUAL UNIVERSITY

Challenges of a Globalized World: Finding New Directions

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In recent years globalization has swelled from a gentle ripple on slow-moving waters to a relentlessly surging flood-tide on a mighty river. As they have landed on human shores, the waves of globalization have brought with them some widely-acclaimed benefits such as ease, cheapness and speed of communication and travel. Other symptoms of our globalized times include a more open trading environment and the consolidation of a global politique in the form of United Nations systems and widely accepted global house-rules such as human rights standards and development goals. A technological revolution, free flowing capital and electronic information highways have delivered new and improved standards of living to many doorsteps. And there is a very real possibility that these waves of change may flow further afield bringing benefit to many more. But while a flowing river's rich nutrients may give rise to lush growth on some banks, other shores may either be left parched or swept away by rolling rapids. Sadly, this remains the case for vast tracts of the human landscape.

Development For All

The challenge of globalization is to marshal the irreversible forces that it commands in ways that truly do bring benefit to the entire human family and the global village that we live in. Globalization must learn to match in developing countries the dramatic reduction in poverty and the overall lifting of standards of living that has been achieved in developed countries. It is far from clear that this will necessarily be the case. Thus while many developed countries have enjoyed a tremendous boost in living standards, the benefits of globalization have yet to make a significant impact, or in some cases, virtually any impact, of a positive nature, on many people in developing countries. Also stranded in the backwaters of the tide of human progress are the many forgotten poorer citizens of wealthier countries. Distribution of the benefits of globalization has not been equitable or spread widely enough. It has mainly been the rich who have got richer while the poor have fallen further behind. Further, globalization has itself brought disadvantages along with its higher-profile benefits; even if its wealthy beneficiaries are indeed financially better off they are often paying a price for it in other ways. And too often, one person's gain has been another person's loss. Welcome change has been seen in some areas but overall our progress has been lopsided and left in its wake a state of imbalance and inequity that urgently needs to be addressed.

On the positive side, many people now have access to information, opportunities and choices that they never had before; knowledge, know-how and capacity have expanded tremendously and living standards have been raised for some. But the other side of the score-card reveals abominations such as the fact that 86% of the world's gross domestic product and 74% of the world's telephone lines are in the hands of 20% of the world's population. Estimates show that the richest 225 people have as much money as the poorest 2.5 billion, or about 40% of all humanity, and the wealth of the richest three individuals is equivalent to the gross domestic product of the entire economies of the poorest 42 countries. While the average American can buy a computer with one month's wages, for the average Bangladeshi, eight year's income is required to buy that same computer. The money-making machine has also failed for the large number of individuals in wealthy countries whose incomes fall below the poverty line.

At the national level, globalization has enabled the net of financial support to be cast far and wide but it has also ensnared many countries who end up paying nearly ten times as much on debt service payments back to the developed world as they do on primary health care for their own people. There are also increasing grounds for concern about globalization's erosion of cultural and social capital and traditions.

Going Beyond The Frontiers In Our Minds

While globalization has initiated or brought about the long-awaited obsolescence or dissolution of various increasingly irrelevant divisions and boundaries, it is clear that history has not yet ended and that the winds of change do not always play to the same tune. Thus while today's global village comprises nearly 200 countries, in 1914 there were only 62 separate states and just 74 in 1946, the year when the global government of the United Nations first met in General Assembly. Thus globalism is often at odds with humanity's need for individualism and a sense of personal or self-identity that is closer to home. Overall, much of the globalization that has taken place has generally been on external or physical terms (such as trade or technology) and has not happened to the same extent at the internal, mental or spiritual level. We have learned to go beyond the frontiers on the ground but divisions and boundaries remain high and wide in our minds. The electronic world is one of a process of continuing dematerialization but we need to parallel this move in our minds so that it brings us closer to the spiritual. For while there may be a global economy or trading world, as yet there is no global spirit.

Quality Of Life And Standards Of Living

For the past two centuries or so, the betterment of the human condition has increasingly been seen as requiring rapid and sustained material growth and much of human endeavour has been directed to this goal. But even the few who have been able to pluck the flower of such growth have begun to find a worm in its heart. Pollution, congestion, excessive materialism and natural limitations are fast spoiling the capitalists' party as it also becomes apparent that financial income is not well correlated with personal happiness. Basic needs must of course be met, but many of those who have thereafter embarked on a materialistic spree have begun wondering to what extent they are willing to sacrifice quality of life for the sake of standard of living. Our steps towards progress must be guided by more than just self-satisfaction and profit-motives that benefit only a few. Knowledge as a whole, science and technology, must all be equitably managed and shared and also take account of the underlying geographical, climatic, ecological and cultural differences within our one world. For example, at present the global production of knowledge and the application of science are profoundly unbalanced. Research is all too often more directed towards the

benefit of developed countries than the developing ones where basic needs remain unmet and where a greater and critical difference could be achieved for less.

A New Governance

Our globalized world is fast-paced, complex and operates on an increasingly intangible level. While the versatility, openness and flexibility of a borderless world creates tremendous opportunities, those same factors also bring vulnerability, insecurity and an unpredictability that would be best avoided. There is a need for mechanisms and other boundaries to isolate and keep at bay malignancies and threats to stability and overall well-being. We need structures and processes to manage the new reality, to harness the good and deal with the bad. Who will take up this challenge? As borders become permeable to lightning-speed information and economic free-flows, the traditional role of governments as the primary wielders of power is in eclipse. Civil society, and business interests, are the new players on the world stage and increasingly it is the social and human repercussions of globalization that must be addressed. Concerns about national security have largely been superseded by demands for human security, preservation of traditional ways of life and a desire for a measure of individual predictability and control as these slip out of the hands of the nation state. As they welcome the involvement of civil society leaders, governments must not shirk their responsibility but, in strategic partnerships, help mould the framework for a new kind of people-centred governance. The new governance must be characterised by enlightened leadership, derived from a spiritual perspective and human and moral values so that we respond to the needs and interests of all the people of the world.

One Globe, One Family

Politicians, economic actors and citizens alike must be equipped with the skills and expertise needed to unleash the forces of globalization for the greater good – the equitable and sustainable creation and distribution of prosperity in which the primary priority is providing for the basic needs of all. A new balance and sharing of power is required – a partnership that is truly for all and centred on people as individuals and the human family as a whole. For while we may live in one world we have yet to become one family.

Amongst the characteristics needed to support this type of governance are new ideas, new visions and a commitment to values.

New Ideas

The wisdom of our new thinking must empower us to transcend that which is divisive in order to find deeply-founded common ground, and not just at the level of information. Information has broken boundaries, crossing them without a visa, and is sitting on our computer screens in our homes, in our living rooms and even in our bedrooms. But what is that doing for us? Is it bringing us wisdom? Wisdom involves going deeper and including an understanding of things that we share in common as well as the differences we embody. For this we need to understand the concept of core values and universal spiritual principles - principles that would support those core values.

In crafting the new governance that our globalized world requires, we need to open up the treasure store of spiritual wisdom. In looking for solutions it is not enough to examine problems simply from a socio-economic basis. We need to look at the roots of today's issues. We need to be reminded that at the deepest level of our individual identity, we have a spiritual identity, the basis of the worth and goodness that are inherent characteristics of

all people. Remembering this will help us to adopt a more spiritual perspective of life as a whole. And it has been well said that self-change leads to world change. So to create a more humane, moral and spiritual world we must first become this ourselves. In this, each individual's contribution is important. Each individual can make a difference. We must re-learn this basic truth. And we must re-learn how to learn, for the wisdom that we need is a practical concept: doing what is right at the right time, and this requires lifelong learning. As global citizens with world responsibilities, we must learn with humility, with conviction and in the awareness of the true meaning of service, for each of us must be servers before we can be leaders.

New Vision

We sometimes seem to be living in a world in which the old is holding us in bondage and restraining us as we try to create our future. Leaders must resist this pull of the past and find ways to develop new visions, free from the prejudices, distrust and hatreds that have been handed down from yesterday. Our vision must take in the strengths of the past but also extend to the present and the future. We need foresight and insight as well as hindsight.

Hindsight: when we look back at history, let us look for the lessons that are there for us to learn, and learn from them. And as we take those lessons forward let us release ourselves from the chains of our past. Let us clean our minds of the prejudices we still carry and of the enmity that has grown from a troubled past. Foresight: let us look at our future with hope and humility. And recognise that the old familiar tools of physical power and financial muscle and the old attitudes and ways of thinking are not enough. Our new plan must be based on new thinking, guided by a new awareness – the awareness of our inherent spirituality and the possibility for us to be guided by the Supreme. We must look at the future with faith.

Insight: To re-find our spirituality, we must learn to look within. By doing so we can repair the broken threads of our trust, honesty and integrity and begin to bring truth and love into our actions, putting the interests of the whole at the centre of our decisions. Enlightened governance requires that we allocate proper resources for the holistic development and growth of all individuals and bring into our learning innovative ways through which we can enhance the subtle, spiritual abilities of the individual. In so doing we will be nurturing a mind that works for peace, an intellect with the conscience to know right from wrong and the commitment to stand up for the greater good of all.

Commitment to values

It is easy to talk about political will and express it in passionate words and lofty resolutions but the call of the time is to go beyond words and rhetoric and ensure that the good intentions of the conference table are implemented in the field. We must not allow political will to get diluted into broken promises. Commitment to that will requires that the primary beneficiaries of the political process, that is the people on whose behalf governments and organizations act, are assured of the benefits that are contained within the documents they endorse. Commitment requires that our values be aligned with our vision for only then will our will and vision be accomplished. Spirituality is the foundation of our vision of the world we want and also of the values and commitment needed to realise it. Setting our direction is one thing – but we also need to commit ourselves to achieving it, for in our globalized world the future of one is the future of all. We must go back to the spirit: the

spirit of the self and the spirit of the world as one family. This is the challenge each of us must take up.

Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University

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The University was founded in India in 1937 and has branches in over 100 countries worldwide.
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