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**ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIFE IN INDIA:
POLLUTION OF POVERTY OR BANE
OF AFFLUENCE?**

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Geneva, March 1980

Johan Galtung

It is being circulated in a pre-publication form to elicit comments from readers and generate dialogue on the subject at this stage of the research.

INTRODUCTION

Of late the concept of alternative ways of life has come into very wide currency. Referring to the experience of rich countries, Galtung notes that alternative ways of life are seriously considered not only because there are limits to resources and to the absorptive capacity of human beings nor because of the inequality and exploitation implicit in their present ways of life. There are also positive motivations: people are looking for something different from the "bureaucratic society of programmed consumption."¹

The search for alternative ways of life in the rich countries has its genesis in the malaise of an industrialized and urbanized civilization. It is a search for a life that is untouched by the bane of affluence, free of alienation, and conducive to the pursuit of meaning and freedom in life. In contrast, talk of any alternative life style in the poor countries must take into account the pervasive poverty, the corroding ignorance, and the degrading inequality that characterize the lives of a large majority of the people in these countries. Because of this contrast, alternative ways of life must manifest different characteristics in the rich and the poor countries. If the alternative must emphasize, in the rich countries, an escape from the baneful influence of affluence and the promotion of a meaningful human existence, it should, in respect of the poor countries, articulate a way of life that seeks to eradicate the pollution of poverty and release the individual from the shackles of dead habits.

While a differential articulation of alternative ways of life is necessary, it is not easy to do. For various reasons, people in the

poor countries have been forced to adopt the main categories and/or the basic assumptions of the life style prevalent in western countries as the only means for survival and even for any possible interaction with other countries of the world. The poor countries have consciously adopted the path of industrialization and urbanism as a panacea for their economic ills. Catching up with the West provides the motivating force in the poor countries for their development efforts.

Catching up with the West is, no doubt, a very attractive goal. The pursuit of this goal, however, has succeeded so far in creating only "western-like amenities for a tiny minority of privileged westernized elites." It has also led to growing disparities among social sectors and geographical regions and has exacerbated the already depressed conditions of the poor. The duality, that is, the co-existence of a tiny westernized affluent sector and a large but poor and under-nourished sector, is likely to be further reinforced if the present trend of development continues unabated. It is in this context that alternative ways of life in respect of poor countries must be conceived. But before this is attempted, it is necessary to look back upon the experience of the poor countries in terms of their development effort and its consequences for the existing life style. We take India as an illustrative case.

1. PERSPECTIVES OF INDIAN PLANNING

The problems relating to life style in India do not emanate from the dysfunctionalities inherent in an industrialized society, but from poverty and its consequences. The present population of India is estimated at around 600 million, 50 per cent of whom suffer from malnutrition or undernourishment. It is also estimated that more than 30 per cent of disposable income is concentrated in only 3 per cent of the population, which enjoys an over-indulgent life style modelled on western society. Thus a duality based on inequality and exploitation characterizes Indian society. It is this context of duality that provided the framework for Indian planning.

Apart from an increase in economic output, equality has been one of the basic objectives of Indian planning. The Planning Commission, referring to the Directive Principles in the Indian Constitution, emphasizes raising the level of nutrition and the standard of living of the people as among the primary duties of the state. Towards this end, economic policy must endeavour to "secure to the citizens, the right to adequate means of livelihood." In addition, effective provision for securing the right to work, the right to education, and the right to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness, disablement, and other cases of undeserved want must also be made. For attaining these ends, the ownership and control of the material resources of the country will have to be so distributed as best subserves the common good. The Planning Commission further notes that the operation of the economic system should not result "in the concentration of wealth and of the means of production in a manner detrimental to the common good. Special stress is laid on the need to secure to all workers, agricultural, industrial, and others, work,

a living wage, conditions of work ensuring a decent standard of life and full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities"

What is visualized then is "an economic and social order based on equality of opportunity, social justice, the right to work, the right to an adequate wage and a measure of social security for all citizens."²

Given the twin objectives of growth and equality, planning in India was geared to increasing agricultural and industrial output, improving the social conditions, and raising the minimum living standards of the people within a reasonably short period; and simultaneously laying the foundations for further expansion of the economy in the more distant future.

Since the commencement of the Five Year Plans in 1951, the emphasis has been on increasing the national income at a reasonably high rate so as to secure a perceptible increase in the per capita income, even after allowing for the growth in population. It has been assumed that such economic growth, with the increase in national income and per capita income, would progressively increase employment opportunities and raise the levels of living, and that the benefits of economic growth would percolate to the unemployed and poorer classes so as to improve their conditions progressively as the per capita income goes up.

In this strategy, a crucial role has been assigned to industrialization, which is to absorb the under-utilized labour force now bottled up in agriculture and the loosely organized sectors of non-agricultural pursuits and radiate stimuli throughout the economy and lift it out of stagnation. Directly and indirectly, modern industry is expected to raise the productivity of the labour force and increase national output and income; rising incomes are then expected to swell the volume of savings and thus finance further investments in industry. In this vision, industrial expansion, once started, touches off a progressive spiral, leading the economy from the "take-off" to "self-sustaining growth."

The process of industrialization, in turn, is to be based on capital-intensive, basic industries. As Mahalanobis states:

In India it would be economical to establish a heavy machine building industry which would manufacture heavy machines and equipment required for the installation of factories for the production of steel, fertilizers, aluminium, etc., or for the production of heavy electrical equipment. . . . It would be also economical gradually to establish large-scale industries for the manufacture of synthetic raw materials of many kinds Once such basic industries are established it would be possible to expand the production of electricity, coal, steel, aluminium, fertilizers, mining and transport equipment, etc. and then, with the help of such heavy machinery, producer goods, and energy, to manufacture machinery for the increasing production of consumer goods.³

It is for the implementation of this vision that, while the first plan concentrated on agricultural development, the subsequent plans shifted attention to rapid industrialization. This suggests the inevitable conclusion that the notion of social change in India consists of an ideal of modernization, meaning the "institutional concomitants of technologically induced economic growth."⁴ This means the raising of production through the use of sophisticated technology and the creation of supportive institutional and attitudinal structures to sustain increasing production.

Apart from higher output per head of the population, a set of institutions and attitudes must be created that would "increase labour efficiency and diligence, effective competition, mobility, and enterprise, permit greater equality of opportunities, make possible higher productivity and well-being and generally promote development."⁵

The quest of modernization is oriented towards the creation, by Indian planners, of a society modelled upon the industrialized, affluent nations of the West. The goal is the total transformation of existing traditional ways of life in their manifold aspects, as they are supposed to be impeding change. While sociologists envisage modernization as a social evolution through increasing differentiation of roles and institutions towards more perfect adaptation, policy

planners have, consciously or unconsciously, identified modernization with ever-growing material prosperity both as an end and as an instrument of undermining traditional productive, social, and power relationships. The two perspectives, it should be emphasized, are supplementary.

Since socio-political aspects of modernization are beyond the pale of directed development in a democratic polity, almost sole reliance has been placed on economic growth as an instrument of social transformation. Consequent upon rapid economic growth is the creation of its concomitants such as urbanization, spread of literacy, and mass media explosion. These are the essential ingredients in making men modern. The emphasis on planned economic development is therefore understandable. It is not only because the centralized political authority has, or can hope to have, some effective control only on the economic sector but also because it is only through rapid economic development that the way for other processes to take root and play their ascribed roles can be paved.

II. THE PLANS IN PRACTICE: PERSISTENT UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Since 1951 five Five Year Plans have been implemented, recording substantial achievements in several areas. The average income of the people has increased substantially. Literacy has gone up and medical facilities have expanded. Infrastructures — power, irrigation, transport, etc. — for rapid industrialization have been laid down.

And yet these achievements fall far short of requirements. Underconsumption is still rampant; indeed, the dominant way of life in India is still characterized by underdevelopment. Population has grown during the last 30 years by over 60 per cent. More than 40 per cent of the population even now remains below the poverty line.⁶ The absolute number of illiterate persons has increased over the years. Several of the backward areas have yet to reach a minimum level of development.

There is no doubt that the last 25 years have seen significant structural changes in the composition of the gross domestic product. For example, the share of the primary sector, i.e., agriculture, declined between 1960-1961 and 1970-1971 from 49.7 to 42.6 per cent while that of mining and manufacturing improved from 15.2 to 17.7 per cent; of power, gas, and water-supply from 0.6 to 1.3 per cent; of transport from 4.3 to 5.1 per cent; and of the other services including communications from 25.7 to 27.9 per cent.

These changes apart, the main questions are whether the Indian economy has recorded a rapid rise in national income and whether the rising income has improved the conditions of the poor and the deprived. These two questions must be considered in the context of the rising

population which is expected to grow from 547 million in 1971 to about 900 million in 2001. To keep pace with the rising population, the national income must also rise rapidly. However, the estimates of national income show that, while in the pre-plan period per capita income grew at the arithmetic rate of only about 1 per cent per annum, it grew at the rate of 4.5 per cent per annum between 1950-1951 and 1958-1959. It then slumped to 3 to 3.5 per cent per annum in subsequent years. The rate of the growth of national income has maintained a rather low level of 3 to 4 per cent per annum. The corresponding net growth of population during the same period has been around 2.2 per cent per annum.

The scanty rise in the national income is reflected in the meagre enhancement in per capita national income and per capita private consumption. Note, for example, that per capita income in 1954-1955 was Rs.231 (about US\$30) at current prices and Rs. 274 (about US\$35.50) at 1960-1961 prices. This rose in 1970-1971 to Rs.626 (about US\$78) at current prices and Rs.345 (about US\$43) at 1960-1961 prices. Similarly, per capita private consumption stood at Rs.209 (about US\$26) at current prices and Rs.261 (about US\$33) at 1960-1961 prices. In 1970-1971 it rose to Rs.543 (about US\$66) at current prices and Rs.298 (about US\$37) at 1960-1961 prices.

The aggregate picture of economic development is not very encouraging. Even less encouraging is the fact that the benefits of development have not gone to the deprived sectors of the society. According to the Planning Commission itself, "Economic development during the last two decades since the inception of planning has resulted in a sizeable increase in average per capita income. There is no doubt that living conditions have improved everywhere, even in the most backward districts. Yet large numbers have remained poor."⁷

This is confirmed by the level of per capita private consumption. The fourth plan deemed private per capita monthly consumption of Rs.20 at 1960-1961 prices to represent the minimum desirable consumption standard. Taking this as the poverty line, 54 per cent of the

population in 1965-1966, about 48.6 per cent in 1968-1969, and an estimated 40 per cent in 1973-1974 fell below the poverty line. On the whole, then, planning has resulted in only a marginal reduction in the extent of poverty in India. Apart from this, it is also noteworthy that the aggregate level of per capita private consumption is only slightly above the poverty line. For example, the average monthly per capita private consumption in 1973-1974 was estimated to be Rs.55.4 at 1972-1973 prices, which, when expressed in 1960-1961 prices, is reduced to only Rs.27.4.

The average picture is revealingly bleak. Even bleaker is the pattern of income distribution and consumption expenditure. As table 1 shows, the poorest 20 per cent of the population has access to only 7 per cent of the total disposable income in India, while the richest 20 per cent enjoys nearly half of the total income. It is also clear that the income share rises slowly in respect of bottom deciles while it jumps towards the uppermost decile indicating an extreme concentration of income at the top.

TABLE 1. Personal Income and Consumption Expenditure

Decile groups of population from bottom (%)	Percentage share in		
	Disposable income	Total consumption	
		Urban	Rural
0 - 10 }	3	2.7	3.3
10 - 20 }	4	4.2	4.8
20 - 30	5	5.3	5.9
30 - 40	6	6.4	6.9
40 - 50	7	7.5	8.0
50 - 60	8	8.8	9.2
60 - 70	9	10.4	10.6
70 - 80	11	12.1	12.5
80 - 90 }	14	16.0	15.4
90 - 100 }	13	26.1	23.5

Sources: Pranab K. Bardhan, "Some Aspects of Inequality," in Ashish Bose, et al., eds., Population in India's Development 1947-2000 (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1974), pp. 66-67.

The unequal distribution of income is reflected in the share of total consumption expenditure. The bottom 20 per cent of the population has a share of about 8 per cent in total consumption expenditure in the

rural area and about 7 per cent in the urban, while the top 20 per cent has a share of about 39 per cent in the rural sector and 42 per cent in the urban. The distribution is obviously somewhat more unequal in the urban sector than in the rural.

To look at it in yet another way, V.M. Rao estimates that, of the total population, 30 per cent comprises the "lower poor," subject to serious undernutrition, and 30 to 35 per cent of the "poor," subject to malnutrition. The "middle class," constituting 32 per cent, gets adequate diet, given the prevailing food habits and preferences, and the "rich class," about 3 per cent, enjoys a very high income and indulges in richer varieties of foods.⁸ According to Rao again, the consumption by the four classes in 1964-1965 was as is shown in table 2.

TABLE 2. Consumption of Food by Four Classes (in Rupees in 1964-1965 per Capita per Month)

	Lowest poor		Poor		Middle		Rich		All classes	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Foodgrains	8.49	7.73	12.57	10.24	16.93	11.63	27.12	11.92	12.87	10.00
Other foods	2.66	4.61	5.24	9.08	10.53	18.50	26.99	24.40	6.42	12.68
Total food	11.15	12.34	17.81	19.32	24.46	30.13	54.11	54.32	19.29	22.68
Total consumer expenditure	13.56	15.96	22.55	26.90	39.06	48.31	116.85	119.69	26.44	36.04

Source: V.M. Rao, Food, p. 12.

As is evident from the table, an average Indian spends about one rupee a day to meet his different needs out of which food claims a little over 70 paise. More striking than the average position is the wide divergence among the four classes. At one extreme, the "lowest poor" class has a total consumption expenditure which is only about a half of even the already low overall average for the country. This class spends over 80 per cent of its total expenditure on food, most of it on foodgrains. At the other extreme are the "rich" with total consumer expenditure over four times of the overall average and nearly nine times of the average of the "lower poor." Spending only 45 per cent of its total expenditure on food, it enjoys a level of consumption of food nearly five times that of the "lower poor"; this ratio is as high as ten in respect of "other foods."

The heterogeneity of Indian society, accentuated by the concentration of large incomes in the small rich class, has its impact on the pattern of consumption. A large proportion of the Indian population is unable to procure enough food to sustain itself. The result is that undernutrition and malnutrition affect close to 70 per cent of the Indian population.

Also of interest is that the mortality rate of children below four years is as high as 40 per cent as compared to less than 7 per cent in most western countries. A major factor here is malnutrition. According to a recent countrywide nutrition survey carried out among a large number of pre-school children, in 90 per cent of them the heights and weights were below the tenth percentile values of American children of corresponding ages. Classified according to weight deficit for age, 18 per cent of the children were suffering from grade III malnutrition (weight deficit of 40 per cent or more), 65 per cent from grade II, and 14 per cent from grade I malnutrition (weight deficit of 25-40 per cent and 10-25 per cent respectively).⁹

It is clear then that only marginal, if any, improvement in the living conditions of the poor has occurred during the last 27 years of planning. Apart from this, social service facilities have also lagged far behind. The allocation of funds for improving educational, health, and other social services has ranged between 10 and 14 per cent of the total plan allocation. In 1971, the proportion of illiterate persons stood at 61 per cent for males and 81 per cent for females. The availability of hospital beds per 10,000 population amounted in 1974 to 5.8. The average of one doctor for 4,246 persons in India in 1974 conceals the extreme disparity of one doctor for 635 persons in Chandigarh to one doctor for about 12,000 persons in Dadar and Nagar Haveli.

Apart from the meagre health facilities, the curse of environmental and other communicable diseases is deep and wide. For instance, there were, among others, 4.3 million cases of dysentery in 1975, 0.8 million of gastroenteritis, 1.2 million of influenza, and 0.1 million of

infectious hepatitis. In respect of deaths by major causes in 1972, violence or injury claimed 4 per cent of the population, childbirth and complicated pregnancy 1.2 per cent, diarrhoea 7.9 per cent, coughs 23.4 per cent, swellings 9 per cent, fevers 15.5 per cent, other infant deaths 11.6 per cent, other clear symptoms 5.3 per cent, and extreme old age and others 22.1 per cent.

The failure of planning in generating a rapid economic growth and stimulating the percolation effect for the benefit of the poor is evident also from the rising incidence of unemployment. While exact measurement of unemployment is difficult, it is shown by Raj Krishna (now a member of the Planning Commission) that the unemployed persons in 1971 included 9.1 million persons who were wholly unemployed and 9.4 million who were severely unemployed and available for additional work.¹⁰ The situation has further worsened since.

III. THE BACKGROUND OF ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF LIFE

The objectives of economic policy, as laid down in the Directive Principles of the Constitution, have yet to be realized. The growth, whatever it is, has not benefited the poor and the deprived. The hope for percolation has not materialized; benefits of growth have not gone downwards but only upwards and sideways. Inequality remains and has, in many respects, deepened. Speaking of growth, Nehru himself recognized:

Large numbers of people have not shared in it and live without the primary necessities of life. On the other side you see a smaller group of really affluent people. They have established an affluent society for themselves, anyhow, though India as a whole may be far from it. . . . I think the new wealth is flowing in a particular direction and not spreading out properly.¹¹

But G.L. Nanda, the then Planning Minister, knew that "so far as the mass of the people in the country were concerned, there were no visible signs of any marked improvement, and of rise in their standard of living."¹²

This is no place to engage in a detailed analysis of why the direction of planned social change in India got deflected from the professed objective. Suffice it to say that the imbalance in sectoral growth, the neglect of rural development, the heavy reliance on investment (meaning: in physical things), and the tendency to view inequality mainly as an "economic" problem and to seek its redress in financial and fiscal terms are some of the factors responsible for the persistence of duality. "The effect has been to exclude from close and continuous scrutiny the institutions and attitudes responsible for inequality. Relegated to obscurity, they are not likely targets for more intensive

reform activity."¹³ As a result, the promise of the removal of economic inequality has remained unfulfilled. In the lack of a policy frame, the economy has operated in the aggregate as almost a laissez-faire economy, in part modified by the operation of particular controls.¹⁴

As a recent study has shown,¹⁵ with the GNP continuing to grow at an average compound rate of 3.1 per cent through 2001, as had been the case during 1950-1975, no significant structural changes will occur and the vast majority of Indian people will remain entrenched in poverty even after the year 2001. According to this study

. . . if we are to break the poverty barrier and achieve the targeted level of living (comparable to the industrialized West) by the year 2001, our GNP must grow at an annual compound rate of at least 13.8 per cent. . . . To achieve this, our savings must grow at the rate of 17.4 per cent per annum and investment at the rate of 17.1 per cent per annum. Simultaneously, the total consumption expenditure must not be permitted to exceed a growth rate of 12.8 per cent per annum. . . . These findings are based on the assumption that India will achieve a breakthrough in checking the population growth rate and consequently the total population will be approximately 864 million by 2001.¹⁶

This is a hope not easily realizable. Even the question of providing adequate food to the entire population by 2001 seems problematic. As Rao observes,

If it is assumed that up to about the early eighties the main endeavour of Indian economy would be to raise the incomes of those falling in the "lower poor" class to the level of the next higher class, it implies an increase of nearly 70 per cent in the per capita consumption of these people. The implied increase in the overall per capita consumer expenditure is from Rs.26 to Rs.33 in the rural area and from Rs.36 to Rs.43 in the urban areas which would need a growth rate of national income between 3.5 per cent and 4 per cent per annum. For the years beyond the early eighties, a growth rate of national income must move beyond 4 per cent per annum.¹⁷

Even if by the end of the year 2000 the proportion of people falling in the "lower poor" class considerably declines, complete abolition of poverty would call for a tempo of growth in excess of 6 per cent per

annum. This means, as Rao points out, that "the growth in national income by itself is unlikely to achieve adequate food for all the classes in Second India." Combined with the falling proportion of the "lower poor" will be the rise in the proportion of the "rich" class. This means an increase in the number of those who can afford "indulgence" in food. "These two indications together suggest that even if India moves along an equity-oriented path of growth, she would still need measures of direct intervention in the production and distribution of food."¹⁸

Even if one were to assure that planned social change in India would succeed in realizing the ideals of modernization, would it be desirable? The engine of planned social change in India is technologically induced economic growth. The leitmotif of this growth is an insatiable acquisitiveness of man manifesting itself in the hunger for more and more material goods. Technological advances and industrial differentiation and growth are means to this end. The proliferation and escalation of wants, and their by-products such as intense competition for access to material resources, heightened aspiration for physical and social mobility, etc., are the natural outcome of technologically induced economic growth.

The proliferation and escalation of wants with all their by-products have far-reaching implications for man, society, and nature in their interaction. Industrialization and urbanization induce physical mobility which, in turn, heralds the process of the breaking up of the family as the prime socializing agent. Along with it, there occurs a great proliferation in the institutional structure consequent upon the growing division of labour and differentiation in social structure and function related with specialization of profession and institutional sector. Each specialized profession and each institutional sector reaches

. . . autonomy which makes meaningful communication among them almost impossible and this virtually prohibits the construction of a coherent identity by the individual. Life is no longer experienced as being embedded in a coherent and total meaning structure . . ., but seems to consist of institutional bits

and pieces which a single individual can hardly put together into a coherent lifespan that may function as a basis for a coherent identity.¹⁹

Consequently individuals assume multiple roles and are required to change them and move from one to another very frequently. Each of the professional sectors imposes on the individual a certain role behaviour and requires from him certain "convictions," thus putting upon him different kinds of identity. Thus industrial society becomes "pluralistic"²⁰ and so does the man's identity.

Unlike animals, the human being, endowed with but a few instincts, has to look outside himself to the cultural environment of institutions for finding directives and incentives for his behaviour and emotions. Lacking the internal organization of instincts and their "genetic logic," human behaviour is rational only because of institutional control. It is institutions that give man's actions and interactions stability, certainty, and duration, and provide his emotions with a framework that both stabilizes and stimulates them. Thus human emotions are not only embedded in but also dependent upon the enveloping institutions. However, a modern, industrialized society grows, because of intensive division of labour, into a complex phenomenon containing countless institutions in separate institutional sectors which impose on the individual roles that often contradict one another and thus hardly produce a coherent identity. In such a society, the individual has to live in different compartmentalized institutional sectors and must be able to change roles during the transition from one sector to another. By frequently changing roles,

he will gradually and often unconsciously develop a kind of role distance which makes an emotional identification with his institutional environment well-nigh impossible. This means, macro-sociologically speaking, that pluralistic society has grown into a reality which is detached from human experience. It confronts man like an abstract labyrinth. This reality is hardly able to mould man's identity in a meaningful way and loses its capacity to stimulate and channel his behaviour. As a result, modern man starts to search for substitutes of a lost meaning, reality and freedom — a kind of existential search unknown in traditional societies.²¹

The institutions, bound together not by an organically grown but by a rationally constructed kind of organization called bureaucracy, are no longer

able to function as channels and stimuli of human emotions, [so] the individual in pluralistic society is thrown back on his own subjectivity where, however, major directives and incentives are absent. This has a most important implication: lacking the rational control of institutions (as traditional man still has), modern man grows in emotionality,²² because in his search for meaning, reality and freedom, emotions now take over the task of institutions. This emotionality has to be artificially escalated continuously since the institutional stimuli and controls cannot be replaced by his biological organism.²³

No doubt, Marx had long ago pointed to man's alienation and sought its remedy in "communism" or a "real community" which would overcome the contradiction between the individual well-being and the collective interest, and between production and consumption arising from division of labour in industry. It should, however, be pointed out that as long as acquisitiveness and proliferation of wants remain the cornerstone of any economic system, industrialization on a big scale will be the natural choice. Once this choice is made, no matter whether it is a capitalist state or a socialist state, alienation of man will remain a crucial problem.

Apart from the relationship between individual and society, there is also the question of ecological balance. The rapacious exploitation of natural resources, the spoliation of nature, and the increasing pollution have their genesis in the cargo cult. As Gandhi said, "Earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed." The predatory attitude towards nature, if it continues unabated, will endanger human existence itself. As John Stuart Mill observed long back:

If the earth must lose that great portion of its pleasantness which it owes to things that the unlimited increase of wealth and population would extirpate from it, for the purpose of enabling it to support a larger, but not a better or a happier population, I sincerely hope, for the sake of posterity, that they will be content to be stationary long before necessity compels them to it.²⁴

IV. OUTLINE OF AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF LIFE

Mill's hope that "they will be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it" calls for an alternative way of life. However, the alternative to the "bane of affluence" is not the "pollution of poverty." For various reasons, poverty cannot be tolerated. Any conception of an alternative way of life must avoid the extremes of corrosive affluence and degrading poverty.

The concept of an alternative way of life must be grounded in the idea of development. The idea of development, in turn, must take note of the linkages among man, society, and nature. Individuals have certain needs — both material and non-material — whose satisfaction depends on a social organizational context presuming a particular relationship with nature. For the satisfaction of material needs certain minimum private family standards of adequate food, shelter, and clothing and certain essential services, provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, public transport, and health and educational facilities are necessary.

Equally important are non-material needs, such as freedom and identity. While the former has to do with freedom of choice in many spheres of life and pertains to the autonomy of individuals and groups, the latter refers to the existential bonds that relate individuals to their social environment. The identity needs pertain to the necessity of the individual to develop ties of affinity with his fellow men. Affinal bonds become instrumental not only in putting a leash on violent outbursts of emotions but also in channelling them in creative or nurturing directions.

The satisfaction of material needs is possible even in a closed society. This is not, however, true of non-material needs. Freedom will be meaningless in a society which puts excessive restraints on or tries to regulate too closely the choices of individuals. Thus the fulfilment of basic needs, especially the non-material needs, is possible only in an open society. In other words, the relationship between individual and society has a vital bearing on the satisfaction of basic needs.

This relationship is, in turn, affected by the production system which generates through the use of technology — both physical and social — certain outputs to be distributed among the members of a particular society. This function establishes a close relationship between man and nature. Thus a triangular relationship among man, society, and nature develops that defines the needs of individuals as well as setting mechanisms in motion for their satisfaction.

The idea of development underlying alternative ways of life must, therefore, concern itself with the relationships among man, society, and nature. It is the totality of this nexus that should provide the framework for thinking about the social order, particularly its institutional structure, that can promote and facilitate the realization of posited values at the individual as well as the collective level. Since production systems, including production relations, have a crucial bearing on social institutions, and since technology influences production systems, the conception of alternative ways of life must take note of the impact of technologically induced economic growth on life style.

Most strategies for meeting basic needs advocate rapid economic growth. While no one will object to the necessity of raising the very low level of living of the people, advocates of rapid economic growth ignore the question of the upper limits of material well-being for insuring human welfare. It is appropriate here to make a distinction, following Gandhi, between needs and wants. The needs are those without whose fulfilment the physical and mental health of the individual cannot be

guaranteed. Beyond these are wants whose satisfaction contributes only to comfort and luxury. And usually the multiplication of wants becomes not "life-furthering" but "life-hindering" according to Fromm.²⁵ The accent on wants leads to an unimaginative association of a high standard of living with power to purchase the goods which the contemporary society produces. However, "the greatest number of different things which the greatest number of people can enjoy is not necessarily the same thing as the greatest good of the greatest number. The important criterion is not the absolute number of different things that people buy with their incomes. It is whether most people can get what they need most."²⁶

The satisfaction of the multiplying wants inexorably leads to a production system that, through the use of sophisticated and big technology, forces the economy to grow ever bigger and more diverse, turning out ever new and more diverse products. "Ever bigger machines, entailing ever bigger concentrations of economic power, exhort ever greater violence against the environment."²⁷ Every increase of wants tends to increase one's dependence on outside forces over which one cannot have control. Freedom is sacrificed for what Gandhi would call "seven days of earthly existence." The fulfilment of material needs curtails the enjoyment of non-material needs. Inequality and exploitation generate violence.

The malaise of an industrial society cannot be uprooted either by making it possible for the rich man to get away from the congested urban centres or by making the poor work so hard that they have no time to think about it. As Tawney observes,

Both the existing economic order and too many of the projects advanced for reconstructing it break down through their neglect of the truism that, since even quite common men have souls, no increase in material wealth will compensate them for arrangements which insult their self-respect and impair their freedom. A reasonable estimate of economic organization must allow for the fact that, unless industry is to be paralysed by recurrent revolts on the part of outraged human nature, it must satisfy criteria which are not purely economic.²⁸

It is in this perspective that the Gandhian prescription of minimizing wants but fulfilling basic needs becomes significant. As Gandhi observes, "If we are to be non-violent we must then not wish for any thing on this earth which the meanest or the lowest of human beings cannot have." For this the relationship between man, society, and nature has to be redefined in such a way that none thrives at the cost of the other. This is possible only when "pacification of both man and nature," as Marcuse puts it, or a non-violent kind of life, as Gandhi conceives it, takes place.

As suggested above, a symbiotic harmony among man, society, and nature is a necessary condition for human welfare. Minimization of wants is one of the ways to achieve this since it will entail the non-use of large-scale technology. And yet technology has to be used for satisfying material basic needs. But the use of technology per se is not to be condemned as long as the technology used is such that it does not create conditions for "man's servility to machine." As Gandhi observes,

I want the dumb millions of our land to be healthy and happy, and I want them to grow spiritually. . . . If we feel the needs of machines, we certainly will have them. Every machine that helps every individual has a place, but there should be no place for machines that concentrate power in a few hands and turn the masses into mere machine minders, if indeed they do not make them unemployed.²⁹

The option of "small" and "medium" technology has therefore to be exercised. This by itself is not enough to ensure human welfare. The element of freedom has to be institutionalized. One of the conditions for institutionalizing freedom is self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency should not mean the insulation of an individual, or a community, or a nation against possible external disturbances. External disturbances will continue to impinge on even a highly insulated society. However, individuals as well as nations have to develop a capacity to absorb, transform, or deflect these disturbances in order to maintain the viability of their own entity. Self-sufficiency should not also mean a lack of interaction between different entities. A meaningful interaction depends on a free and equal exchange. Similarly, self-sufficiency need not mean a lower standard of living, because a large

variety of things, most of which are not essential for human welfare, is not a sufficient criterion of physical and mental health. Self-sufficiency thus decreases the degree of dependence and constitutes an essential condition for freedom.

Participation is another condition for the viability of freedom. People must participate in the making of decisions which affect them. A meaningful participation assumes self-sufficiency as well as an appropriate size of the decision-making arena. In a highly industrialized and large society, too many forces operate on which very few people can have effective influence. Decentralization therefore becomes another necessary condition for the preservation of freedom. Such a decentralization, to be effective, must include both economic and political components of the social order.

The fundamental restructuring of life styles, of economic base, and of outlook, envisaged in the preceding pages, cannot be effected as long as duality within and between societies exists. With the shrinking of the world, the swift transmission of ideas, fashions, preferences has made national societies extremely vulnerable to external influences. The co-existence of a highly industrialized, technological, and centralized society along with a low-energy-consuming society is no longer possible. Talk of such a co-existence smacks of a conspiracy to maintain the status quo and keep "backward" economies in a perpetual state of depression. This duality at the international level must therefore go.

The radical restructuring brooks no delay. Mill's hope "to be content to be stationary, long before necessity compels them to it," cannot apply to India. The abject poverty cannot be tolerated. The pollution of poverty must go. However, the alternative is not the bane of affluence. As Tinbergen observes, "It will have to be solved by certain types of idealism on the side of its leading personalities — to be understood in a wider sense: an idealism based perhaps on Gandhian principles of simplicity and austerity."³⁰ But an austere and simple India of Gandhi's dream is an impossibility in the midst of an affluent and affluence-seeking world.

NOTES

1. Johan Galtung, "Alternative Life Styles in Rich Societies," in Marc Nerfin, ed., Another Development: Approaches and Strategies (Uppasala: The Dag Hammerskjold Foundation, 1977), pp. 106-121.
2. Government of India, Planning Commission, The First Five Year Plan — A Draft Outline (New Delhi, 1951), p. 11.
3. P.C. Mahalanobis, "Industrialization of Underdeveloped Countries — A Means to Peace," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, vol. xv, no. 1 (January 1959), p. 15.
4. The phrase is from Peter Berger, et al., The Homeless Mind (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, 1974).
5. Gunnar Myrdal, Asian Drama (New York: Pantheon, 1968), vol. 1, p. 60.
6. If one takes Rs.15 per head per month at 1960-1961 prices (or Rs.26 at current prices) as the absolute poverty line in the rural sector and Rs.18 for the urban, it is estimated that in 1968-1969 as much as 54 per cent of the rural population and 41 per cent of the urban population were below the poverty line. This means that 280 million people — a figure larger than the population of North and Central America — were below the poverty line. The situation has not changed much. One may consider Rs.15 per head per month at 1960-1961 prices a very low amount. However, this is a figure that relates to individual not household income.
7. Government of India, Planning Commission, Draft Fifth Five Year Plan: 1974-1979, vol. 1, p. 6.
8. V.M. Rao, Food, Second India Studies (Delhi: The Macmillan Co. of India Ltd., 1975), pp. 4-5.
9. See C. Gopalan, "Some Aspects of Nutrition in India," in Ashish Bose, et al., eds., Population in India's Development, 1947-2000 (Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1974), p. 104.
10. See Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Rehabilitation (Department of Labour and Employment), Report of the Committee on Unemployment (May 1973), p. 54.
11. Jawaharlal Nehru, "Strategy of the Third Plan," in Problems of the Third Plan: A Critical Miscellany (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961), pp. 49-50.

12. G.L. Nanda, "Realization of Objectives," *ibid.*, p. 53.
13. Myrdal, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 763.
14. D.R. Gadgil quoted in B.S. Minhas, "Where Planning Went Wrong," published in three parts in Hindustan Times, 10, 11, 13 May 1974.
15. Economic Research Division, Birla Institute of Scientific Research, India 2001 (New Delhi: Arnold-Heinemann, 1976).
16. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
17. Rao, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21. According to the Planning Commission the share of the bottom 30 per cent of the population at present has been estimated at 13.46 per cent of the total private consumption. If this share remains unchanged, the average per capita consumption of the bottom 30 per cent would rise from Rs.25 per month (at 1972-1973 prices) in 1973-1974 to Rs.29 in 1978-1979, Rs. 35 in 1983-1984, and Rs.38 in 1985-1986. Thus, even towards the late 1980s, the per capita consumption of this segment of population would be below the norm of Rs.40.6 per month at 1972-1973 prices. Draft Fifth Five Year Plan, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
18. Rao, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
19. Zijderfeld, "Rationality and Irrationality in Pluralistic Society," Social Research, vol. 37, no. 1 (Spring 1970), pp. 24-25.
20. Zijderfeld makes a distinction between "plural" and "pluralistic" societies. Following J.S. Furnival, he applies the term "plural society" to a situation in which "a society is divided into two or more sub-cultures existing next to each other rather independently, each of them maintaining a certain amount of autonomy. It is mostly applied to colonial situations in which colonialists and so-called 'natives' live next to and independent of each other, socially, culturally, and economically. The concept 'pluralistic society' refers to the fact that industrial society exhibits a social structure which consists of many rather autonomous and relatively isolated institutional sectors, each of them imposing on the individual a set of roles as well as norms and values." (Zijderfeld, *ibid.*, p. 22, footnote 1.) He juxtaposes the concept of "pluralistic society" to the concept of "traditional society" which possesses a uniform and coherent social structure based on religiously rooted tradition. It should be pointed out that the use of the term "fragmented society" would describe the industrial society better.
21. Zijderfeld, *op. cit.* (words underscored here are italicized in the original).
22. The use of the term "emotionality" is not at all happy. Emotionality does not necessarily mean the absence of congeniality. What Zijderfeld means perhaps is the growth of irrationality whereby man's deep frustrations find an expression in extremely aggressive behaviour.
23. Zijderfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 38 (words underscored here are italicized in the original).

24. John Stuart Mill, Principles of Political Economy (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin, Pelican Classics, 1970), book iv, p. 116.
25. Eric Fromm, The Revolution of Hope (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 156.
26. B.N. Ganguly, "The Future Quality of the Population," in Ashish Bose, et al., op cit., p. 37.
27. E.F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), p. 31.
28. R.H. Tawney, Religion and the Rise of Capitalism, quoted in Schumacher, *ibid.*
29. Schumacher, op. cit., p. 32.
30. Jan Tinbergen, "Socialistic Pattern of Society," roneoed, quoted in Myrdal, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 766, footnote 1.