

# Global Growth in Uncertain Times : The Bahudha Approach to Life, Peace and Prosperity<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

On the Global Growth in these un-certain times and how Bahudha approach has coalition of Nations against terrorism. The Approach is useful to answer questions like "what could we do to achieve Harmony in the World so globalization, yet with Nations so unequal, living in mutual distrust, fear, and worst terror". This approach is both an idea and reality. The Bahudha philosophy helps in resolution of conflicts in an Innovative and creative fashion so that in any given situation, the maximum position win-win position for all concerned can be accomplished. As the head for the Center for Peace and Prosperity at IIF, we have been focusing on developing means and mechanisms to develop this approach and align the objectives of Nations to bring Peace, Harmony and Prosperity not undermining the Human intelligence, human capital and human needs for growth and prosperity. No Growth at any One's cost can bring prosperity in the Society. The Bahudha Approach has answers to such complex problems.

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## I. Introduction

DISTINGUISHED DIGNITARIES, FRIENDS and colleagues, I am extremely happy to deliver this address where you all are present. The day long proceedings have been of a very high intellectual value and thought provoking. I would be sharing my thoughts on the global growth in these uncertain times and how Bahudha Approach, which I have propounded, can be useful. The Bahudha Approach has interesting origins. At the time of the 9/11 catastrophe in the USA, I was Executive Director of the World Bank in 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 2001 itself in Washington DC. The gathering

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was impressive; I was seated almost opposite the chairperson. The guest speaker had concluded on the sombre note outlining the need for building a coalition of nations against terrorism. She also spoke of the radicalization of Islam, values of religious pluralism, and the need for tolerance. After the presentation was 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 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?

## II. The Bahudha Philosophy

The Bahudha philosophy is central to the generation of an attitude which creates an environment for harmony among communities and religions, harmony between nature and men and enables a person to understand the other's point of view in the realm of life and religion, science and spirituality. The pluralist approach towards all life and every human faith is at the heart of India's civilizational endeavours. This approach has been both an idea and reality. The interpretation of plurality as an idea helps us understand our cultural diversity and incredible ethnic, religious and linguistic realities. As a reality, it enables us to participate in this diversity. In my view, it is not simply tolerance for other's point of view but seeking of understanding. For example, you may not be a good neighbor with tolerance alone. For it does not remove, our ignorance of one another, it only creates a pre-condition for that.

Now what role can Bahudha play in today's world. This concept can move from one part of India to other, things can move from one city of India, one village of India to outside its boundaries. These are some of the things which are a product of a realization that we cannot progress all by ourselves. We must ensure that we do what we are entitled to. I have been thinking and I find that climate is another major problem for growth and this new concept that India has advocated of One Country, One Earth, One Family and One World needs to be respected in letter and spirit. We have to unite the country first in terms of all these issues and then we can focus on earth as a family "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" (the world is one family).

The culture of Bahudhâ is not the absence of conflict, it recognizes the fact that in a diverse world with so many races, languages, and religions and competing claims over limited economic and educational opportunities, conflict will continue to be a part of the life process among individuals and nations. The Bahudhâ approach only helps in resolution of the conflicts in an innovative and creative fashion so that in any given situation the maximum win-win position for all concerned can be accomplished.

The philosophy of "one truth, many expressions" would help people engage themselves in the light of their heritage, which is full of love and compassion. They will be able to see clearly the need to abstain from terrorism and violence, war and destruction, and enter into an era of mutual respect

and understanding, peace and development. Such a process can be determined by massive participation of the people and not guided by the domination of a few. A revolutionary transformation is possible and Bahudhâ is an attitude to further that process.

The Bahudhâ culture offers an environment in which, over time, people and nations can learn to respect different points of view and eschew fear and hatred. It can help institute the dialogue process and consolidate the gains. Bahudhâ goes beyond the moral realm, and, in practical terms, it is the cornerstone of plural society and liberal democracy.

The Bahudhâ approach can be regarded as a prerequisite of democracy, harmony, integration, and peace. The true spirit of Bahudhâ is an attitude of persevering and attempting to solve problems according to the principles of peace, rather than by resorting to aggression or repression, even if one side crosses the limits of tolerance. In other words, the psychological and intellectual attitude that recognizes differences and diversity solicits harmonious and peaceful coexistence among incompatibles.

Now for thousands of years, humanity lived in a harmonious relationship with nature. The wave of industrial revolution that began 250 years ago and is continuing, marked a major turning point in earth's ecology and humans' relationship with the environment. There was simultaneously also a feeling that if we have superior armed forces we can enter another country and capture their wealth and that ultimately led to a colonial order. The United States and also India and a number of the other countries became victims of that. In the aftermath of the First World War there emerged two Blocs - the American Bloc and the Soviet Bloc. The United States which had superior quality of arms functions in a manner that they do not share all types of arms even to their allies or even close partners, This also characterized countries of the Soviet Bloc.

Many a times we saw the things going from bad to worse. Much worse is happening today, as you know Ukraine war, the Israel conflict and people are being captured and killed, countries are suffering from malnutrition, from deprivations and still we have no answer. The UN system is rather helpless. So whether it is health, whether it is climate, whether it is disarmament, the answer is dialogue, the answer is trust but these things can't come easily. These can only come when we have the dialogue, we have trust as enunciated in Bahudha Approach. I'm giving you an example. We had the problem in the hills cutting of trees, so we started the Chipco movement. I have met their authors, we have given them awards but there was another problem and which we are facing today, these are fragile hills. We are building modern development things like underground tunnels and as a result the mountain is going down, we are opening the water ways and sending it down, the result is there are problem of scarcity of water, the problems of floods and allied matters. How to solve these problems. I believe with the Bahudha approach and that is the earth has enough to feed us, produce enough grains to feed us but what we are doing is all kinds of excessive things in forests in water systems. Fortunately generations of our agricultural scientists, our technology scientists have the talent to solve but we are unable to combine our knowledge and wisdom with our issues.

The UN system is on the brink of collapse and even at times even the Secretary General's words are not taken note of. For example, recently, Israel said that who is the Security Council to lecture at us. This disrespect for the institutions which we have created to solve the problems, is being ill-treated. So it is in this context that science alone, politics alone are not giving the full answer. Wisdom is required and the wisdom comes with the Bahudha Approach of dialogue. The wisdom comes from your feelings that unless you don't talk to the other side or you don't talk amongst yourselves you cannot have the answer.

Violence at some period of history might have been necessary for human survival. Today, with access to nuclear weapons and the like, it is self-destructive. So non-violence, gentleness, kindness, intelligence, and dialogue are qualities that need to be cultivated. As Robert A. F. Thurman says "*We need schools for self-restraint and gentleness, boot-camps for the battle of self-conquest. We need monasticism and its disciplines to become accessible to the masses, to help them in the form of secular educational curricula, disciplines of behaviour, mind, and intellect.*"<sup>1</sup>

The danger of ineffective handling of terrorism also comes from 'failed' states. The world is threatened less by strong nation-states than by tottering and failing ones. The danger lies in the fact that these "failing" or "failed states" have a tendency to establish a nexus with criminals, drug mafia, and fundamentalists. There are several countries in Africa and also in Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East who are likely to be in the cycle of civil unrest, conflict and collapse.

As you all are aware, India-Pakistan relations are at the lowest after the brutal incident that occurred on April 22, 2025 in Pahalgam, where terrorists shot innocent people after asking them their religion. It was the height of cruelty. It was a deliberate attempt to engulf Bharat in the flames of violence. It was a conspiracy to incite riots in the country. India has believed in dialogue and aggression has been the last resort. Prime Minister Narendra Modi while replying to a debate in Parliament said "*it is our resolve, we will turn the terrorists into dust, and I publicly stated that even their masterminds will be punished, with a punishment beyond imagination.*" He further stated "I would like to remind this House of a few key events. When the surgical strike happened, we had a clear objective — to destroy the terrorists' launching pads across the border. Our soldiers carried out the operation overnight and returned before sunrise, having completed the mission. The goal was to accomplish this. When the Balakot air strike was conducted, the target was clear — the terrorist training centres — and we successfully destroyed them. We achieved that too. Similarly, during Operation Sindoor, we had a clear objective: to strike the epicentres of terror — the very locations where the Pahalgam attack was planned, where training, logistics, recruitment, and funding were managed. We identified these hubs and struck directly at the nerve centre of terrorism during Operation Sindoor."

A country long steeped in the tradition of deploying and exporting terrorism has no shame in advancing the most ludicrous narratives to that and let us recall that it sheltered Osama bin Laden for a decade even while

pretending to partner in the War Against Terrorism. They themselves have acknowledged that they have been operating terrorist camps for decades. In the past also, Pakistan has been responsible for a terrorist attacks on innocent civilians in India. We have exercised the right to defend our people against such actions and have brought the organizers and perpetrators to justice.

Where terrorism is a concern, we should make it clear, that there will be no distinction between the terrorists and their sponsors. Both will be held accountable. No one will be allowed to practice terrorism under the cover for nuclear blackmail. India will never bow to such threats. India's message to the world is clear. There must be zero tolerance for terrorism.

It is very clear that no civilians were targeted and the action was against terrorism. India has always asked for a direct dialogue without any intermediaries to resolve the issues.

In utilizing our newly acquired proficiency in technology, while machines do help us save our time and energy, but the moot question is has it served promotion of common public good; has it not landed us in a mess; and we have deviated from the objectives of living in harmony with nature. Are we according priority to the means while neglecting the ends to work for building an ecological civilization that outline the ways of living in harmony with nature at local, National, Regional and Global levels needs contemplation. Widespread industrialization, the proliferation of factories, destruction of forests for the construction of roads, blocking rivers for building massive dams and power stations and the movement of vehicles and migration of people have all caused serious disturbances in the ecosystem. The resulting climate change and global warming have to be viewed in this context.

There is a credible threat to human survival from global warming and climate change. It has the potential to damage the lives and habitats of billions of people in different parts of the world. The ecological challenge varies from area to area. For instance, during the World Summit for Peace, Security and Human Development held at Seoul in South Korea in August 2015, I had the opportunity of interacting with President Anote Tong of Kiribati, an island and discussed with him various aspects of climate change. He mentioned that by 2050 Kiribati is predicted to be submerged due to rising sea levels. As President Tong observed in the Inaugural Sunhak Peace Prize Ceremony at Seoul and I am quoting him "*Climate change affects all of us in varying degrees of severity, but for my people and all those who live on atoll islands, we are at the frontline of this global calamity with the very real possibility that our islands, our livelihoods, our homes, our identity as people and as a culture may not exist within this century*".

So he said that climate change is the biggest human challenge of the 21st century before the international community. In fact the situation is so bad in that island that when people go to bed they do not know that tomorrow they may not be physically present even in this country even if they remain alive because of the precautions that they have taken. So everything is at a stake. In this background wisdom has to be in forefront. I have called it in

another lecture titled “Are we on a Cliff” and we are so we must know we must combine science with wisdom so that we know how to come on the right path. Some good things happened. Fortunately, the concern for the safety of the planet earth is catching widespread attention at various levels. At the turn of the 20th century world leaders came together at the United Nations and pledged to pursue with vigour and determination the millennium development goals for a period of 15 years from 2000 to 2015. Eight goals formed part of the program which included to ensure environmental sustainability and to develop a global partnership for development. In 2015, the world leaders assembled again at the UN and adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets calling it ‘Transforming Our World’ – the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development’. The 17 SDGs included “Climate Action”, “Life on Land,” and “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.” These goals have direct bearing upon the building of ecological civilization and how we follow the Bahudha Approach.

One is painfully aware that the UN and its agencies are not effective agents of delivery of common public goods. In fact, the present political, economic, trade and cultural bodies have shown a limited appetite for management of ecological and environmental issues. In reality, they are deeply deficient in managing their own basic charter of duty which primarily relates to security, trade, and finances. At the same time, there is no world government in sight as the nation states cannot subordinate their sovereignty. At best they can delegate certain powers to global agencies to tackle them.

### **III. Conclusion**

I expect that future generation, with its basic survival needs met and with superior knowledge and resources to implement technical options, will respond to such environmental issues, for the world will have enough of technologists who will manage to deliver clean water, healthcare facilities and protect humanity from nature’s wrath. We in India are fueling India’s ambition not only through the banking and regulatory processes but also through technology, innovation and inclusion. The real threat to a habitable and sustainable world in the coming decades would arise from the continuing social turmoil associated with religious and ethnic differences among people. Political ambitions of national states could always push a region towards wars and conflicts.

I strongly feel that strengthening of open societies where dialogue has primacy and where the spirit of understanding another’s point of view is cultivated leads to a better world. Fundamentalism or that a particular view of the world must prevail is the worst of all ideologies and must be discarded. The Bahudha Approach thus becomes crucial.

I believe that both institutions and individuals are important. Institutions mould character and individuals, provide resilience and flexibility to institutions. Propagation of values central to ecological civilization would require the support of farmers and the working class people as well as that of teachers and scholars, educational institutions and centres of excellence. The constructive role of media, including social media, cannot be overemphasized.

This could help generate social movement. For to preserve and strengthen, hope calls upon our wisdom and our energy. Mahatma Gandhi had challenged us to “be the change we want to see in the world.” Let us accept it. The need is to nurture the moral strength of men and women and their leaders to live with compassion and to spend their energies working for peace and inclusive development and respect for nature.

We live in a world in which a mutual interaction among traditions and a sharing of knowledge and moral and spiritual experience is taking place. An examination of the way in which people live in multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial societies in different parts of the world underscores the need to respect pluralities.

For achieving social solidarity, the Bahudhâ approach of dialogue and tolerance needs to be cultivated. A toleration that is genuinely voluntary would be of great help. Arnold Toynbee rightly says:

The fundamental positive motive for toleration is a recognition of the truth that religious conflict is not just a nuisance but is a sin. It is sinful because it arouses the wild beast in human nature. Religious persecution, too, is sinful because no one has a right to try to stand between another human soul and God. Every soul has a right to commune with God in God’s and his soul’s way’ and the particular way concerns none but God and the particular soul in question. . . . Toleration does not become perfect until it has been transfigured into love.

Different ideas relevant to the furtherance of social harmony have flourished in all civilizations of the world. The growing knowledge in the world establishes that concepts and principles related to human rights and ecology are not as culture-specific as is often claimed. A new moral imagination and new political imagination should go together to permeate both rationality and respect in our dialogues.

In the Foreword to my Book “Bahudha and the Post-9/11 World”, His Holiness the Dalai Lama wrote “*Our world today requires us to accept the oneness of humanity. In the past, isolated communities could afford to think of one another as fundamentally separate. Some could even exist in total isolation. But nowadays, what happens in one part of the world rapidly affects people in many other places too. Within the context of our new interdependence, self-interest clearly lies in considering the interest of others*”. Friends, the Bahudha Approach, therefore, has to be viewed in a much wider context for our peace, prosperity and growth that requires dialogue, that requires respect for another persons’ view point. It may be recalled that while working in various capacities in Assam, Meghalaya, New Delhi, and Washington DC, such as Deputy Commissioner, Kamrup; Additional Production Commissioner, Guwahati; Culture Secretary, Home Secretary, Govt. of India; Executive Director at the World Bank; and the last being as Governor of Sikkim, I have always strived for consensus through dialogue. My work has been appreciated by several distinguished people and has been recorded in the Book ‘Governor at Work’. Some quotes are (a) “It is important to combine these values of tradition with the technological and scientific development. B.P. Singh is a person who has attempted to translate the lessons of this culture into his life”;

(b) "B.P. Singh served as the ambassador extraordinaire for the global poor."; (c) "B.P. Singh's dedication and service to the community is in itself a religion. His contribution in the field of Indian education and culture are outstanding and well-known to everyone."; (d) "Mr. B.P. Singh's works help in building a dynamic and responsive society – a society throbbing with hope and laughter."; (e) "The concept of Bahudha is extracted and distilled from India's history – a synthesis of the Indian version of pluralism, tolerance and harmony. The frightening power that forms of culture now generate can be corrected by the countervailing force of enlightened cultural values from Indian history. In many ways, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been a terribly violent period and that violence is carrying over into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We have few instruments to prevent this – Bahudha makes efforts to build a fire-wall to stop this spill-over."; (f) "B.P. Singh's scholarship embraces many areas – history, sociology, economics, culture, ecology and international relations – areas in which his books and other writings have made significant impacts." (g) "The idea that there is one truth and many interpretations may be open to philosophical challenge, but it is very interesting and exciting idea to reflect on this approach." (h) "B.P. Singh puts forward the view that consciously we must work for propagating the values of a global family. It is our duty to inculcate the Bahudha approach in our society."; (i) "B.P. Singh's notion of Bahudha has the potential of opening a line of thinking that involves both the moral choice and an intellectual endeavor."

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