

Paper Presented by

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Having been invited as Hindu religious representative of KAICIID (King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue) to this august seminar by World Bank, I would like to lay down the basic parameters of the vision and view point of the Vedas and Upanishads as enunciated by many great Eastern and Western scholars:-

' Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' meaning One God, One Universe and One Human Family (non- human living birds, animal and creatures as extended family).

Over centuries of degeneration due to orthodoxy, ritualistic & dogmatic interpretation of the universal spiritual values of the Vedas- we find an overwhelming majority of our human family in chains of:

1. Gender Inequality (with extreme cases of female feticide)
2. Abominable Caste system - Dalit persecution
3. Racial prejudices like Apartheid
4. Adivasis (indigenous people) being the most discriminated and disadvantaged
5. The ever widening disparity between the haves & the have-nots. (Oxfam report – 62 individuals who own more than half of world's poor)
6. Industrial animal farming and slaughter of one billion birds and animals every day – The single largest factor for green house gases. (UN report in the shadow of livestock industry.)
7. Burgeoning alcoholism and human trafficking based sex industry, playing havoc with all human values.

The Vaidic vision of God makes it absolutely clear that “All human beings are born equal” as per creator God of Justice. Also the first Article of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But due to man made structural misadventures, majority of children are born into above mentioned chains of gross inequality, injustice, discrimination and what I would like to call- structural violence.

As women and men of Religion and God, it is our spiritual commitment and command to end this structural violence.

We in Arya Samaj (a universal spiritual movement founded by Swami Dayanand in 1875 after the vision of the Vedas) who are opposed to idolatry, casteism, gender inequality, superstition & obscurantism etc) are mandated to do this as part of our worship to God. It is pertinent here to make it clear that God is an all pervasive, formless, supremely conscious universal energy of Truth, Love, Compassion and Justice which can be communed only through meditation in deep silence (Samadhi) and pro-actively but non-violently challenging the dark forces of untruth, tyranny, unfreedom, violence, hatred and injustice. For such a communion, human heart, mind and body are the real most sacred temple with no need for man made structures of temple, mosque, church etc.

It also obviates the need for any God incarnation (Avtar) or exclusive prophet and the so called God men and God women.

Though spiritual to the core, I find powerful resonance in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Earth Charter, CEDAW (Convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women) an so on.

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1. Any social transformation agenda requires a spiritual foundation that is broadly accepted as ethical and moral. Today, there is the now classic framework of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), within which the article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience and religion is

paramount as well as that of article 19 on the freedom of expression. Both are complementary to each other, and should never be seen in competition. This was one of the important premise and conclusion of the KAICIID European Media Forum last June 2015 in Paris.

2. A social transformation agenda must include the need to increase the culture of global citizenship, in addition to (not replacement of) that of national citizenship. Such global citizenship education (GCE) in particular must, in the words of UNESCO's GCE programme, "equip learners of all ages with those **values, knowledge and skills** that are based on and instill **respect for human rights, social justice, diversity, gender equality and environmental sustainability** and that empower learners to be **responsible global citizens.**" Learning about dialogue and increasing dialogical practices directly contributes to 'those values, knowledge and skills' that learners need to not only survive today, but to contribute harmoniously to a better quality of life for themselves and all members of human society.
3. Dialogue, both intercultural and interreligious, is also a tool to promote and live up to the UNDP's aims as it now promotes Social Cohesion worldwide.
4. Finally, there is no way to transform existing conflicts without multi-lateral dialogues, part of which must include the representatives of religious communities best organized through local, national, and regional interreligious dialogue platforms that must play a concrete role to finding and putting in place the solutions for reconciliation and peace. Through these platforms, leaders of religious communities, both women and men, young and elderly, can be seen publicly to be part of the solutions, not part of the problems.
5. Given that war is the most devastating cause of environmental degradation, working on social transformation to prevent, stop, and do post-conflict rebuilding is an urgent necessity of our day, worldwide.

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In the above context, I have the following to submit about the Indian situation

Political Context

India today is witnessing increased assault on religious minorities. Dissent is being criminalised. Civil society organisations are targeted for supporting people who have been victims of atrocities by state and non-state actors. Media is under attack. Fundamentalist groups are feeling empowered to shower violent attack on anybody coming on the way of their understanding of nationalism, freedom of expression and questioning the dominant role of religious beliefs (Eg. murder of Pansare, Dhabolkar, Kalburgi etc)

World Bank cannot ignore these realities, and finance and support the developmental agenda of a government, which is reluctant to take a position against these atrocities. By financing projects unquestioned, World Bank is inadvertently condoning these.

Discrimination - caste, gender, religion

India has been a victim of discrimination - whether caste, gender, religion or ethnicity. While because of a consistent political struggle, these sections of the population have asserted their right place in the society to a great extent, the struggle is continuing. World Bank should not be financing projects, where there are no safeguards to protect the rights of these sections.

Dispossession of poor and marginalised

A development model based on unchecked consumption and expansion of market has pushed a large number of populations - mainly the marginalised adivasis (indigenous people), women and poor, who are dependent on natural resources - to dispossession and destitution.

Millions have been forced into Bonded Labour System (Modern forms of Slavery) Since 1980-81. I have been, as Chairperson of Bonded Labour Liberation Front, espousing the cause of their liberation. But inspite of a deterrent legislation in 1976 and a land mark Supreme Court Judgement of 1984(3 SCC 1984), the official machinery has been stonewalling all our efforts.

While a lot has been financed in the name of poor and poverty, World Bank's overall influence has been to push ahead such a flawed development model. In many cases certain activities carried out in the name of economic development, aided by the World Bank, have caused irreversible damage to environment and communities.

Lacuna in implementation

Despite a good set of policies, in the past, World Bank's record of implementing those on the ground has been dismal. Whether it is the case of Narmada dam, or Tata Mundra power project or the upcoming dams in the Himalayas, repeatedly what we have seen is a failure to implement those policies. More importantly, there have not been attempts to learn from past mistakes. Failure to implement the policies on the ground makes the existence of good policies meaningless for the people, negatively impacted by Bank funded projects.

India's voices Bank should hear

The position India takes at the World Bank through its Executive Director is not representative of the voices of India. Such positions are not debated in the Parliament, or amongst the civil society organisations or publicly in the media. Those positions are just the ones that reflect the outlook of a certain government in power.

People in the country support a strong policy based on internationally accepted standards of human rights and labour standards. We support a policy based on the principles of sustainability, equity and justice.

Human Rights

We support the position of the UN Human Rights Special Rapporteurs and other officials when they say “Rather than seeing human rights as a means by which to facilitate the participation and empowerment of the beneficiaries of development, the Bank’s proposed new Safeguards seem to view human rights in largely negative terms, as considerations that, if taken seriously, will only drive up the cost of lending rather than contributing to ensuring a positive outcome.” Philip Alston, Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

Thank You