

## I-13. Is It Sustainable?

*Pajatta* is for sustainability in terms of the needs for the survival of an individual as well as the group. These are the needs of the body, food, sensory exploration of the environment, communication, and ability to make sensible decisions.

Sustainability is a lasting concern for virtually all organisms, especially those who depend on organized societies. These concerns go beyond the survival needs. Need for food and safe habitat are widely recognized. But there are more subtle forces for extinction such as the use of DDT that threatened survival of many species. Also transfer of diseases by Europeans to the New World virtually wiped out the native populations (Chapter III-15). Since we all share a very similar biochemical metabolic system the poisons and diseases can easily jump across the species boundaries. Ability to change the environment introduces special demands and responsibilities for successful interactions in an interdependent environment. Concerns for survival also include cultures. Needless to say cultural diversity is disappearing in the globalized world.

**Are we becoming more dependent?** The dependent (*apajatta*) beings that can not make choices include:

- (a) Some microscopic organisms are dependent. For example parasites exist only in relation to the host.
- (b) Psychosomatic origins of *niray* make them dependent on human for their expression.
- (c) Virtually all *dev*, whether celestial or imagined depend on our wishes and desires.
- (d) An important distinction is drawn for the five-sensed *tirikkh* with sensibility. Through chaotic restraint (State V) they make

occasional rational choices, and to that extent they are independent.

(e) Possessed and obsessed (*labdh-paryay*) humans are dependent on the psychosomatic and social factors.

(f) Humans hired to say or do things are dependent. They do not have choice of restraint.

The idea of independence revolves around the survival needs where freedom from want gives freedom to choose. The drive to realize potential comes from the independence of being and choices offered by the independence of the sensibility and mind. Responsibility for the choices and decisions also requires restraint that is also part of the feedback for the validation of the experience. This is not gratification or Pavlovian response. Restraints are learnt from feedback, and other abilities and skills follow. As we see in Chapter G the transition from disorder to chaos to order comes from restraints, and this transition is necessary for personal and intellectual growth, and ethical development. Learning from feedback has other implications for bring about a change. The main consideration is to make choices, sustain effort and live with the consequences.

Environment goes well beyond air, water and food. We are beginning to recognize that we may be able to forage, but only if we are not choked off in other ways. Our own foot-prints on the workings of the planet are beginning to haunt us. Many of the current practices were encouraged by misconceptions of competition for survival, and other mis-measures of fitness for survival in terms of the law of jungle. The same holds for the depletion of the resources and other environmental changes. Such threats to sustainability are far more difficult to deal with because we do not have sufficient knowledge and experience. Even in the case where we have sufficient knowledge, we do not have political will. Actions and decisions that have consequences for the long term well-being and survival also have unintended

consequences. Death from smoking does not come announced, or does it?

It is not trivial to think of a starting point if the causality can not be established. Situation is analogous to the spread of the plague in Europe during the Middle Ages. It often followed wars, but the connection to the life cycles of rats-fleas-bacteria, that spread through deserted homes and fields, did not become clear for several centuries. The current challenge to the global depletion of resources is equally insidious. It comes from the forces that lie in the commons far beyond the "village boundaries."

Human activities and consumption patterns in distant lands have an almost instantaneous economic effect even on those who do not benefit from the resource utilization. Yet the innocent pay a heavy toll for the economic upheavals, dislocations and depletions set in motion by the consumption patterns. The mind-set of assuring one's own short-term survival does not necessarily assure the same outcome for the others. Where does the responsibility lie?

**Living beings render service to one another** (*Paraspar upahraho jivanam*). This quote (From Tattvartha Sutr by Umasawati, ca 400AD) positively epitomizes the call for responsibility for the shared space and environment. A rational basis for sustainable existence and conflict resolution can follow from desire to curtail irreversible actions in personal and social behaviors. What are the secular assumptions necessary to arrive at the concept to evaluate actions with lasting consequences?

Consider the connection between *syad* and the code for nonviolent conduct. Consideration of less than a complete knowledge obligatorily calls for non-violence as the basis for successful behavior. It is prudent to avoid irreversible actions like violence. Several recent cases from the USA illustrate the point: On re-examination by the students of the North Western

University law school, 16 out of the 24 inmates on death row in Illinois were found to be convicted of crimes that they had never committed. Later this turned out to be so for virtually all the states in the country. The DNA finger printing exonerated many!

Importance of nonviolence to assert rights of individuals and nations has become a universal principle but only during the last century. Time magazine recognized Mahatma Gandhi as one of the three most influential persons of the twentieth century. Mahaveer is also considered to be one of the 100 most influential persons of all time [Hart, 1992]. The socio-biological truths of “live, let live, and thrive” are intricately associated with ideas of survival instinct to eco-preservation. By such measures even the violence against ideas and feelings is to be avoided because such actions one may unwittingly discard useful possibilities and alternatives. Similarly, *a-parigrah* (being not possessed by the possessions) is an alternative to over-consumption.

Mahatma Gandhi acknowledged that in his teen years occasional contact with Jain monks introduced to him the ideas of nonviolence and a-parigrah. In his autobiography, Gandhi also acknowledged that in his search for truth, “three moderns have left a deep impression on my life and captivate me: Rai Chand by his living contact, Tolstoy by his book *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, and Ruskin by his book *Unto the Last*.” After his return from London in 1891, Raichand Mehta (Johari) reaffirmed Gandhi's insights in nonviolence with a more activist interpretation that strikes a deeper chord: “Violence begets violence” but it requires great insight to recognize that “an eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind.”

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