

ANUVRAT AND SUSTAINABILITY

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Dismal Scenario : The Deepening Crisis of Non-Sustainability

The world is passing through the worst crisis of its existence nowadays. It is true that the last two centuries have witnessed unprecedented progress on account of the advent of science. Man has conquered the land, the seas and the sky to a great extent. He now has the most modern means of transport - cars, buses and trains including the bullet trains which can take him to another part of the region with a terrific speed of more than 400 kilometres an hour. In historical books we read that upto the invention of the steam engine in the 18th century the fastest means of travelling were horse-drawn carriages or horses which were used by the royals and the rich of the earlier society. Ordinary people used bullock carts. Mostly man used to trudge along wearily.

He can now swim like a fish and has fast moving ships that ferry goods from one corner of the earth to the other. As a result now no one dies on account of famines or droughts. The greatest scientific revolution in reducing the distances across the world is the invention of airplane which has virtually reduced the globe to a small village. There are now heavy and small industries which supply all the needs one can think of. But the price for all these material comforts that man enjoys today is very heavy. Natural resources which sustain our life are depleting fast. The coal and petroleum which are the main sources of our energy needs have almost run out. If their over-exploitation continues unabated and human lifestyle does not change very little will be left for the future generations. Moreover by 2050 even the present generation may face the worst crisis of shortages of basic needs including electricity which the world produces by thermal or nuclear power. Petroleum is not only necessary for propelling our transport system but also for running industries.

The scale of the devastation caused by humans activities at all levels is so great that the earth's natural carrying capacity has now been destroyed. It is unable to repair the damage. Our forests are shrinking. The bludgeoning human population has devoured most of them. As a result many important species essential for our survival have vanished. Their natural habitats have been snatched away by multiplying human population. We were just one billion at the turn of the twentieth century. It maintained the sustainability of the earth till then. We are seven billion now. There is a great imbalance between the growth of humans and non-humans (plants, trees, birds, animals and subtle life forms including microbes and bacteria).

Apart from this imbalance the waste caused by developmental activities including the nuclear waste has polluted the environment around us. As a result many deadly diseases have sprung up and are taking a great toll of human beings. The emission of greenhouse gases from industries, cars, airplanes are destroying the ozone layers which protect us from excessive heat of the sun. Our rivers which used to flow all the year round have either dried up or are reduced to streamlets. There is an unprecedented shortage of drinking water across the world. Natural disasters in the form of tsunamis, cyclones, floods and earthquakes have increased manifold. Moreover with the increase in wealth and prosperity man's greed and selfishness have multiplied.

The twentieth century was the bloodiest of all. Two world wars were fought in less than fifty years which killed millions of innocent people. The two world wars also destroyed the environment to a great extent. The most celebrated ecologist of the twentieth century Arne Naes has rightly concluded that the eco-sustainability of the future is being destroyed on account of unsustainable development. In order to arrest this trend of devastation Naes suggests that both humans and non-humans should flourish together. There is a thread of

interconnectedness that binds us all together. We need to slow down the pace of our development so that the eco-sustainability of the future may be ensured.

The Advent of Anuvrat Movement - a Mode of Sustainable Living

Acharya Tulsi, a Jain visionary of the twentieth century and head of a Jain sect called Terapanth, realized the potential threat to our survival into the third millennium. He concluded that it is man's unrestrained desire that lies at the root of this crisis of unsustainability. He launched the Anuvrat Movement in 1949 as an antidote to the cloud of unsustainability closing in on humankind. What is ANUVRAT? *anu* means small and *vrata* means a vow. Taken together it means a small vow. Acharya Tulsi studied the human psyche and came to the conclusion that religions have the tradition of vows which people, irrespective of their faiths, volunteer to observe in order to abstain from sinful activities.

We humans have a propensity to indulge in undesirable activities for worldly gains though we know that it is wrong. Spiritual leaders belonging to various faiths encourage their followers to restrict their sinful activities by accepting certain vows. A vow is a formal and serious promise. It carries with it a great spiritual force. A person can break a law but if he takes a vow, he keeps it despite adverse circumstances. Acharya Tulsi also realized that householders cannot take big vows as living in this world they are compelled to do many such things as are forbidden for them. He therefore chose small vows called *anuvrats*. He laid down a moral code of conduct for a householder consisting of eleven vows. It can be considered a road map to sustainable living.

Conceptual Understanding of the Small Vows (ANUVRATS)

The first small vow '*anuvrat*' is - 'I shall not kill an innocent creature deliberately.' It enjoins a person to refrain from deliberate and intentional killing of innocent creatures. Though abstinence from all forms of violence is an ideal, in a worldly life violence is inevitable and if all individuals take this vow the world would be a better place to live in and it would be free from heinous forms of

violence, from all kinds of wars. It is a small beginning with a small vow but it may usher in an era of peace in the world. In addition the man who pledges to refrain from killing an innocent creature will not hunt animals for sport or for fun. The Jains even cover their mouths with white strips of cloth lest their hot breath kill living forms in the air. An individual can pledge that he would not kill a human being at least. Thousands are killed for money or sex every year. This vow also goes a long way in preventing unnecessary violence. The vow of a person not to kill an innocent creature also saves him from many undesirable things.

The second small vow is also an extension of the first one in that it enjoins an *anuvrati* not to commit aggression, nor support it. It further expects him to endeavour for disarmament and world peace. It may prevent wars and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction. It was framed in the wake of the second world war which caused unprecedented destruction. The third '*anuvrat*' also aims at minimizing social violence. It enjoins an *anuvrati* not to take part in violent agitations or any destructive activities. The fourth '*anuvrat*' calls for human unity. Sadly the humanity today is fragmented into castes, religions, nationalities, races and linguistic groups. The greatest problem the humanity faces today is that of religious intolerance. We see the world today in the grip of incredible forms of violence committed in the name of religion. Anuvrat Code of Conduct enjoins an *anuvrati* (one committed to the observance of anuvrat code of conduct) not only to believe in human unity but also in religious tolerance so essential for the sustainability of our planet.

The sixth *anuvrat* of this code of moral conduct emphasizes the observance of rectitude in a man's day-to-day life. It includes his personal, professional and artistic integrity. The world is beset with the problem of decadence in moral and spiritual values which are indispensable for a healthy society. Whether it is politics or business or education we find rampant corruption everywhere. This vow can curb immoral practices in society. The seventh '*anuvrat*' is framed to control the

incidents of rape and sexual harassment as well as the human desire to possess limitless wealth and material objects. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen. On the one hand people are rolling in wealth, on the other hand a vast multitude live below poverty line and go to bed hungry. This disparity in society is responsible for most forms of violence we see today. It is a vow that ensures the sustainability and eco-system of the planet and prevents sexual violence.

The eighth *anuvrat* enjoins a person not to resort to unethical practices in elections. Most countries of the world today practise democracy. Governments at local and state levels are elected by adult franchise. In many developing countries politicians throw ethical norms to the winds and resort to unfair means to get elected. The practice of deceit is common everywhere. Acharya Tulsi foresaw this problem and made it obligatory for an *anuvrati* politician to abstain from unethical practices in elections. Apart from them many social evils are in vogue. The evil practices like sacrificing animals at an altar of a god or goddess or organizing a big feast at the death of someone etc. are prevalent in India. The ninth vow is supposed to curb these evil social customs. The tenth *anuvrat* enjoins an *anuvrati* to live a life free of addictions to drugs. Drugs are ruining the lives of our youths. They are being rendered mentally wrecks. Instead of contributing to the progress of a nation, they are becoming liabilities. Drugs have no place in a healthy society and the main aim of Anuvrat Movement is to create a healthy and nonviolent society. The eleventh vow directly addresses the problem of environment today. It enjoins an *anuvrati* to refrain from such acts as are likely to cause pollution and harm the environment. An *anuvrati* takes a vow that he will not cut trees and will not waste water.