

ANUVRAT MOVEMENT AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIVIDUAL LIFESTYLE

While it is the duty of medicos to analyze and examine the devastatingly debilitating effects of luxurious and sedentary lifestyle on the health of an individual from medical point of view, the aim of my presentation is to acquaint the medicos with the most encouraging results and unprecedented success ANUVRAT MOVEMENT has achieved in changing the lifestyle of thousands of people in India and abroad by inspiration and persuasion and by seeking individual commitments to basic values. It has saved them not only from many deadly diseases but has also made their lives joyful and harmonious. ANUVRATS or what we call 'small vows' have helped them to get rid of hypertension, diabetes, coronary heart disease, peptic ulcer and bronchial asthma which are the by products of the modern lifestyle rooted in luxury, exhibitionism, fashion, fads and in our taste for excessively rich diets. You are all familiar with the maxim 'prevention is better than cure'. ANUVRAT MOVEMENT inspires people to adopt simple lifestyle in tune with nature and ecology and thus prevents the growth and spread of many dreaded diseases like cancer and AIDS among individuals.

Before I analyse the impact of the movement on individual lifestyle I would like to say briefly what ANUVRAT is and how it was used effectively to bring about a complete change in individual lifestyle and how it turned out to be a mass movement.

By 'anuvrat' we mean small vows or an individual's commitment to adhering to basic values on voluntary basis. A vow plays an important role in a person's life irrespective of his profession, caste and nationality. Almost all faiths have traditions of vows. We accept vows or promises or commitments out of our convictions and beliefs.

ANUVRAT MOVEMENT is basically a mass movement to propagate simple lifestyle based on self-restraint. In a way it is helping medicos by creating an awareness among the people against the consequences of unrestrained life. It is a moral code of conduct enjoining self-restraint in every aspect of life on individuals. Our unrestrained behaviour is the main cause of our suffering.

Years ago His Holiness Tulsi realized that a human being's general tendency is that he keeps a vow he has taken despite adverse circumstance whether he is a Jain or Hindu or Muslim or Christian. Even doctors in their personal lives observe vows for self-satisfaction. Distressed at the ever-growing tendency of individuals to take to a pompous and gaudy lifestyle, H.H. Tulsi decided to rid society of moral filth which gives rise to an unhealthy society. He launched the ANUVRAT MOVEMENT in 1949. It received spontaneous support from all national leaders including Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Lal Bahadur Shastri. ANUVRATS are meant for all categories of people. The Movement is thoroughly non-sectarian and is dedicated to the rejuvenation of the effete moral and spiritual values. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan who lauded the movement highly wrote:

“There is a general feeling in the country that while we are attending to the material progress and doing substantial work in that direction, we are neglecting the human side of the true progress. A civilized human being must be free from greed, vanity passion and anger. Civilizations decline if there is a coarsening of moral fibre, if there is callousness of heart. This is unfortunate and to remedy this growing indiscipline, lack of rectitude, egotism, the ANUVRAT MOVEMENT was started by Acharya Tulsi on March 1, 1949. It requires strict adherence to the principles of good life. It is intended to impart education in moral and spiritual values.”

The Aims of the Movement were

1. to inspire people to observe self-restraint irrespective of their caste, colour, creed, country or language,
2. to establish the values of friendship, unity, peace and morality, and
3. to create a healthy society free from all kinds of exploitation.

The Directive Principles of the Anuvrat Movement are as follows:

1. Developing human unity
2. Developing the feeling of co-existence
3. Developing rectitude of behaviour
4. Developing the technique of introspection
5. Developing right standards in society
6. Developing trust in the purity of means
7. Developing will-power and self-restraint
8. Developing communal harmony
9. Developing inner purity
10. Developing fearlessness, objectivity and truthfulness
11. Developing non-attachment
12. Developing an awareness of the limits of individual possession and consumption
13. Developing a process of bringing about transformation of consciousness and emotional state.

The following Anuvrats (small vows) were prescribed for all:

1. I will not willfully kill and innocent creature.
2. I will neither attack anybody nor support aggression and will endeavour to bring about world peace and disarmament.
3. I will not take part in violent agitations or in any destructive activities.
4. I will believe in human unity, will not discriminate on the basis of caste, colour, etc., and will not practise untouchability.
5. I will practise religious toleration. I will not rouse sectarian frenzy.
6. I will observe rectitude in business and general behaviour. I will not harm others in order to serve any ends. I will not practise deceit.
7. I will set limits to the practice of continence and acquisition.
8. I will not resort to unethical practices in elections.

9. I will not encourage socially evil customs.
10. I will lead a life free from addictions. I will not use intoxicants like alcohol, hemp, heroin, etc.
11. I will always be alert to the problem of keeping the environment pollution free. I will not cut down trees. I will not waste water.

In addition to the above, there are separate vows for employees, teacher, students, doctors, businesspersons, farmers, etc. H.H. Tulsi didn't make tall claims about his mission. In all humility he says:

“ I have a vision of the future, but I do not believe in over-optimism. The outlines of a society in which people live according to the ideals of Anuvrat are very much before me, but to change them into a colorful picture more time and energy would be needed, besides refining the technique of adjustment. Anuvrat has always been committed to the carrying out of its objective. It has brought within the reach of thousands of people the basic code of conduct for development of life. A large number of them have changed the course of their lives by adopting it. I think it has played an unexpectedly big role in bringing about a revolution in ideas. But according to me a revolution is incomplete unless it emerges in a concrete shape before the people. The objectives of total revolution and *Anuvrat are different*. Therefore, I do not think the former can take place using the platform of Anuvrat. But I am sure total revolution can fructify whenever and wherever the Anuvrat philosophy is effectively reflected in the life of the people.”

The Movement embodied a vision of a harmonious society free from exploitation and conflict. There is a striking similarity between his vision and that of Tagore's heaven of freedom as pictured by him in his immortal work *Gitanjali*.

The most important thing about the Movement is that it strives after the middle path steering clear of the two extremes of absolute asceticism (mahavrats) and unbridled materialism resulting in moral torpor and acedia. The Anuvrat Movement aims at ushering in an era of self-awakening- the antithesis of the Atomic age.

A look at the vows will reveal that a person who accepts ANUVRATS is bound to practise self-restraint in dietary habits. He shuns meat eating and takes to vegetarianism. He gives up drugs, alcohol, smoking and controls his temptation to resort to unethical practices to acquire wealth. His vow to eat vegetarian diet saves him from many problems.

It will be interesting for all of you to know of the cattle culture in the west and its dreadful effect on our ecology. According to a study carried out by JEREMY RIFKIN in his book *Beyond Beef*, there are currently 1.28 billion cattle populating the earth. They take up nearly 24 percent of the landmass of the planet and consume enough grain to feed hundreds of millions of people. Their combined weight exceeds that of human population on earth. It depicts a world in which the poorest people of the planet have been starved to support the beef addiction of a handful of wealthy nations. In Europe, U.S.A. and Japan

the addiction to beef has resulted in millions of deaths from heart attacks, cancer and diabetes – the diseases of affluence.

This study should open our eyes and intensive efforts should be made to restrict, curb and eliminate gradually the cattle culture which is not only at the root of poverty and starvation in the world but it is also responsible for making humanity diseased and mentally crippled.

ANUVRAT MOVEMENT is an answer to the problem of cattle culture and has in it a potential to save humanity from extinction. A vow strengthens a person's will. It is only the first step. H.H. Tulsi went further and asked his successor Acharya Mahapragya to evolve a scientific system of meditation. As a result Preksha Meditation was developed. It is the best way to help an individual to control his senses and emotions. Preksha Meditation has now become an integral part of ANUVRAT MOVEMENT. H.H. Tulsi did not stop here. He also concentrated his attention on the future citizens of the world, i.e. students. A complete course to make them physically, mentally and emotionally fit was designed. It is known as Jivan Vigyan or Science of Living. Thousands of students and teachers have joined the movement and for the first time serious efforts are being made to give birth to a healthy society.

Education is the most important area wherein ANUVRAT is doing significant work. If doctors also join the movement and do not restrict themselves to merely analyzing health vis-à-vis lifestyle but come forward and go beyond it by undertaking the education of the masses, we can foresee a bright future for humanity. I would like to quote Dr. S. Radhakrishnan here. He has remarked:

“The aim of education is to train us to appreciate the eternal values, the supreme human virtues and the simple decencies of life. We must be educated not for cruelty and for power But for care and kindness. We must foster the freedom of the mind, the humanity of the heart and the integrity of the individual.”

This is precisely what ANUVRAT MOVEMENT is doing. More than a hundred thousand teachers have already become ANUVRATS and are now popularizing Jivan Vigyan among students. The number of ANUVRAT students is swelling day by day.

The Movement is making its presence felt in all major countries. More and more people in the West are coming forward to support it as they look on it as a means to arrest ecological and environmental degradation and restore pristine glory. It is a movement that inspires people to adopt simple lifestyle.