

CHILDREN OF THE EARTH

Ecological Awareness

Note

- ✓ *These jottings are based on the story of a Red Indian chief deeply in love with nature.*
- ✓ *Primitive people were truly children- rather sons and daughter- of the earth*
- ✓ *Modern man has become an orphan on earth. He lost his mother.*

Introductory Thoughts Helpful for Reflection and Discussion:

Primitive man was close to nature. Whether as hunter or herdsman, farmer or medicine-man, he was totally dependent on nature for the needs of his body, mind and spirit.

The starry heavens, rainfall and snowfall, darkness and sunshine, lightning and thunder, storm-clouds, towering mountains, roaring torrents, dark forests, endless stretches of sand, the living deities of the winds – all these elements and forces of nature filled the ancients with feelings of awe, fascination and reverence.

This had far-reaching consequences for members of the traditional societies right from post-Neolithic times till the advent of modern man.

Not only were man's ways of living and thinking closely bound up with nature but, even more, his identification with nature acquired a spiritual meaning and significance that found tangible expression in myth, ritual, image and symbol.

All skills and techniques, all knowledge and action took on a sacred aspect. To primitive man, nature was an epiphany of God.

Wherever these traditional patterns of life and culture are still in existence as among the tribal communities of India, Africa and North America, they are being relentlessly encroached upon and systematically destroyed by our technological civilization.

No doubt modern science and technology have made stunning progress in every field of human endeavor; but, at what cost? Not only has the good earth been ecologically ravaged and environmentally polluted, but modern man is condemned to live in a de-sacralized world

This has happened because the concepts that made possible the astonishing progress of science and technology operate only at a purely secular level. They aim only at a mastery over matter and creation that is purely materialistic; human, moral, spiritual and transcendental values have been obliterated.

In what follows we have a concrete example of how the culture and ethos of a segment of traditional society is being threatened.

THE RED INDIAN CHIEF.

(A free adaptation s from the script of a Spanish Audiovisual.)

A Government's Proposal to a Red India Chief.

The Government of the U.S.A. through its local representative approached an old Red Indian Chief to sound him on his willingness to sell a sizeable stretch of land belonging to an Indian Reservation.

The idea behind this feeler was ultimately to wheedle him with the lure of money and other material inducements, into parting with the land for the ostensible purpose of offering the original settlers the bounties of 'civilization'. The real purpose was of setting up an urban complex providing more living space for American Citizens and greater scope for their entrepreneurial ambitions.

The Indian Chief's Reply to the Government.

'Do you think that you can buy the deep blue of the sky, the sweet smell of earth, the cool air and the transparency of water? How do you intend buying these things which are inseparable from our land and of which we are not the masters? Every little bit of land here is sacred to me and to my people. So is every pine tree, every grain of sand on the beach, every drop of dew in the dark woods, every sound of bird and insect.'

'We are part and parcel of the land as much as it is of us. Everything on it – the trees swaying in the breeze, the flowers scattering their perfume in the air, the horse carrying its rider across mountain and prairie, the cattle grazing on the plains, the eagle soaring high up in the sky – speaks to us of our ancestors.'

'The sights and sounds and smells that come to us from cliff and flat land, from forest and farm loudly proclaim that we , along with all other living creatures, belong to one great family'.

'The crystalline purity of our brooks and lakes reflects the blood our forefathers. The murmur of the mountain streams reminds us of the ancient glories of our land.'

'We treat our rivers with motherly tenderness because they slake our thirst and borne on their backs, our canoes take us to places of work or worship or festivity. They are our sisters as the earth is our mother and the sky our brother.'

'Our mode of living is so different from that of the white man. Though the earth on which we and the white man live is the same, our relationship to it and our feelings towards it are so different'

'The white man treats the land as a commodity to be bought and sold, grabbed and exploited. To him the earth is not a mother, but an enemy to be conquered and kept under subjection'.

‘The cities of the white man are characterized by the artificial noises of machines and instruments, by the rush of traffic, by mechanized living. They hurt the eye and the ear and the mind of the red skin.’

‘Where in this steel and concrete jungle of the white man can we listen to the rustle of leaves, the buzzing of insects, the lowing of cattle, the notes of bird song?’

‘We have seen the white man desecrate the beauty of our countryside with cable and pylons and chimney stacks; we have seen him pollute our rivers with poisonous wastes.’

‘To the white man, we may be primitive in our ways, but we believe and feel in the depths of our hearts that the very soil we stand on is mingled with the ashes of our ancestors. We believe that the fate of our children is bound up with the fate of the earth, that while the earth is our Mother, God is our common father who makes his sun shine and his rain fall on everything, mountain and valley, fertile and barren land, good things and bad.’

‘It is true that our God is the same as the white man’s. But the white man lives as if he has no need for God.’

‘The voice of God that comes to us in the whisper of the pine swaying in the wind, the gurgle of running brooks and the living sounds of the forest in the darkness of the night is stilled by the din of his cities, the tumult of his machines.’

‘If we have to sell our land, what will the white man do to respect our values and traditions, our attachment to the land which centuries have given us?’

‘What will he do to preserve our forest wealth, our wildlife, our fisheries, our religious beliefs and art and culture, steeped in myth and image ritual? Will we have to give up the peace and harmony, the spontaneity and authenticity of our ancient way of life in exchange for the benefits of the kind of ‘civilized’ life the white man plans to thrust on us?’

‘Will all this mean the end of life for us as a race and the beginning of a struggle for survival?’

POINTS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION:

1. Whose style of life is more humane and satisfying, the one of the ‘primitive’ man or of ours – the ‘civilized’ man? Why?
2. Has nature a ‘sacred’ value? Which?
3. What ‘spiritual’ messages does nature give us? List them.
4. Can we ‘modern’ men hear those messages? Why?
5. Whose feelings and sensitivity are more refined, those of the ‘primitive’ man or those of the ‘technological’ man? Why?
6. What happens when the ‘sacred’ meaning of nature is lost? Find its effects all around us. Describe them.

7. What 'spiritual' and 'psychological' losses, progress and technology have brought us? Enumerate them.
8. Could science be 'socialized' and 'humanized' to make our world a better and more livable place? How?
9. How to 'immunize' ourselves against the evil affects of the prevalent materialistic and selfish value system our, so called. 'developed' world live by?
10. How can we recover a love for nature? Give suggestions.
11. Explain the following sentences::
 - 'Primitive' man loved nature. 'Modern' man lusts for nature.'
 - 'Primitive' man lived. Modern man "struggles to survive!"
 - Primitive man worshiped nature Modern man rapes nature"
 - Primitive man received from nature. Modern man robs and plunders nature
 - Modern improvements 'impoverished our life
 - Every new scientific and technological discovery takes a toll. from nature
12. Science, as we have it now, is becoming a Frankenstein threatening to destroy its makers.
13. Modern inventions increase our knowledge, not our wisdom.
14. Modern inventions do us a lot of good, but they do not make us good.