



The Leadership the World Needs

Ashok Natarajan

Secretary & Senior Research Fellow, The Mother's Service Society, India;
Fellow, World Academy of Art & Science

Abstract

As society evolves in consciousness, the character of its leadership evolves as well. The physical stage of human development is characterized by the rule of physical strength and directed by military leaders with the capacity to mobilize and exercise physical force through violence. In the vital-social stage, leadership shifts to the authority of custom and law backed by a wealthy aristocratic elite which exercises power by virtue of its dominant position in the social hierarchy. The emergence of mentality makes possible a more equitable distribution of power to the masses and a transition to governance by laws and institutions based on principles of justice, ideas and universal values. The SDGs cannot be achieved by the UN alone or even by national governments. The problems of humanity today are global in nature, complex and inextricably interlinked. They can be effectively addressed only by a broad-based social movement that awakens the aspirations and releases the energies of the wider population. Such a movement can best be awakened and directed by the power of ideas based on a comprehensive and integrated knowledge of society and human potential. The risk of existential threats alone has thus far proven insufficient to effectively mobilize global society to concerted action. Humanity needs to be positively inspired by a vision of a better future for all, which has yet to be formulated. For developing nations, the goal should be total eradication of poverty and material prosperity for all. For advanced nations it should be a shift from the pursuit of material accumulation to ever higher levels of well-being and human development for all. Ideas founded on rationality and truthfulness espoused by a global leadership of individuals or organizations have the power to serve as the catalyst for that movement.

The world has so far been led by individual leaders with the exception of ancient Greece, which was inspired for a short time by the power of Ideas. Rome developed law and founded a vast empire based on the rule of law, but it attained its heights on the basis of the achievements of Julius and Augustus Caesar. From that time onward, Europe became the center of the civilized world. These were periods in which leadership was backed by military might. Caesar and Napoleon were outstanding military leaders who acquired power by their courage, military knowledge and leadership skills. Military leadership is primarily physical in character, founded on physical strength and organized violence. Heroism was achieved by conquest and destruction of opponents. Those were days when spectators enjoyed witnessing gladiators battling lions and each other to the death or the torture of helpless victims. It was a culture of physical violence, cruelty and tyranny. In later centuries this violence persisted in the form of state-sponsored religious persecution, which survives even today. The origin of

England's Irish problem was the persecution of other religions for several centuries. Those were days when might was declared right simply on the basis of strength. Today, it expresses in the form of the tyranny of the majority.

The spread of democracy and education is a result of the evolution of humanity from physical to mental consciousness. The conscious mind serves as a greater seat of truth than the subconscious vital herd mentality or the unconscious habits of the physical body. Mental ideas and organization are the source for all the progress of civilization. At the level of the animal, the stronger animal leads the herd by virtue of its physical prowess. Physical strength delights in destruction. In a vital society, falsehood, darkness and ignorance fortify the physical consciousness and retard its evolution to mentality and rationality. Physical leadership thrives on falsehood and violence. Democracy, parliament, an educated population and a free press do not support the reign of falsehood to the extent prevalent in totalitarian states. Hitler and Stalin both organized their leadership on that basis. Both banned foreign journalists from entering their states to prevent the spread of news to foreign countries. Though democracy had its nascent roots in 1600, dictators like Stalin and Hitler suppressed and fabricated information throughout history to strengthen their control. These were short-lived attempts that could not survive, for Truth does not allow falsehood a long reign. Long ago, states mastered the art of suppressing and distorting facts, bluffing and hypocrisy. When Stalin died in 1953, Khrushchev denounced the cruelty and injustice of Stalin's misrule of the country, which came as a shocking revelation to the Soviet people. Disclosures of this nature help move the world from falsehood to Truth.

The passage of time fosters the revelation of truth. Time belongs to the spiritual plane, while falsehood belongs to the darkness of ignorance. Viable and enduring leadership can be built only upon the basis of truth, or at least rationality. States can no longer survive on the basis of organized falsehood. Charismatic leaders have always manipulated the masses with fear-mongering and the hysteria of hatred. The public today is more conscious of their true character and less susceptible to their illusions, even when prevented from openly expressing their opposition. Glasnost opened the door to permit the suppressed opposition in the Soviet bloc to express their true sentiments. Donald Trump may continue to project falsehood wherever he goes, but as in the case of Reagan he is exposed by the media each and every time. Short-term success does not ensure long term survival. However vulgar and disconcerting to sensible minds, his power can only be short-lived. Rather, his blatant and total disregard for truth of fact is an expression of the darkness before the dawn announcing its approaching death and the exit of falsehood from the arena of national politics and international diplomacy. This is akin to what occurred in the mid-19th century when the slave states launched the American Civil War in order to both preserve and extend slavery to the new territories out West at precisely the very moment in history when slavery and slave trade were being abolished in nations around the world and had become a thing of the past with no right to exist any longer. The legacy of the past was finally destroyed by a violent struggle. Today, it can be overcome by a persistent insistence on truth.

Threats such as climate change and economic crisis loom large today. The world has progressed significantly since the Club of Rome published *Limits to Growth* in 1972. Progress

has been considerable, though based on a negative vision of catastrophe to be avoided rather than a positive vision of the opportunities for human development and social evolution. It is better to seek a positive approach based on a knowledge that can inspire all, rather than relying on fear as the prime mover.

“Ideas are the primary instrument available to the World Academy of Art and Science to offer leadership to the world— leadership in thought that leads to action.”

Integration of knowledge is stymied by specialization. Specialization developed rapidly over the last two centuries, resulting in an increasing fragmentation of knowledge, compartmentalized policies and divided operational responsibilities. Specialization need not generate problems, provided the underlying knowledge is integrated and unified. Today, it is highly fragmented, especially in the social sciences. The divorce of finance from the real economy is an obvious example. Banking and financial markets played a crucial role in the development of global economy in the early 20th century. Business flourished on the basis of capital accrued from public savings. European entrepreneurs set up limited liability companies to pool capital for larger enterprises. Governments supported this initiative with the necessary legal framework. This single legal innovation opened up infinite opportunities for people doing business. It enabled them to acquire the funds needed for unlimited growth and limited the risks of investors to the amount of capital they contributed. The East India Company promised a return of minimum 10%, which reached a maximum of 20% now and then. In this way business expanded rapidly. Gradually the focus shifted from investment in production to pure speculation. The very success of financialization began to undermine investment in the real economy and had a destabilizing impact on exchange rates, foreign investment and trade. The finance-led economy reached a crisis point in 1929. When he became president in 1933, Franklin Roosevelt found that no conventional economic policy measures could stem the banking panic. He finally overcame the crisis by appealing to public confidence in the psychological roots of American society.

Life is infinitely resourceful. As humanity advances, it opens up so many avenues for individual progress. At the same time, for those who do not want to lead an idealistic life, less positive opportunities open up. Marriage used to be an institution that stabilized social relationships. But parallel to that, concubinage also flourished. On top of that, extra-marital relationships also became quite pervasive. The internet and cryptocurrencies are powerful systems for enhancing human welfare, but they also lend themselves to illegal and destructive purposes such as fake news, fraud, and the illicit drug and arms trade. These are negative examples of the infinite resourcefulness of society.

Since the Great Crash in 1929, the world economy has been hit by a continuous succession of smaller financial crises, the most recent being in 2008. Most often, the response to problems is to resort to negative measures that temporarily suppress but do not eliminate the root cause,

thus facilitating their eventual recurrence. Many of the measures adopted to stem the 2008 crisis have benefitted those who profited by it at the expense of the general public. The result is a dramatic rise in inequality, flat incomes for the lower half of society, exorbitant corporate profits and renewed cycles of speculation. Each time society resorts to negative measures to address a crisis, it becomes more difficult and costly to solve the problem. A positive approach is needed and the leadership that is ready to take up this positive approach must offer the necessary social and intellectual support to be accepted by society.

“[Achievement of SDGs] must be based on a total knowledge, objective knowledge of scientific technology integrated with subjective life knowledge representing emotional awareness of the external world and humanity’s aspiration for the future.”

1. Power of Ideas

Ideas are the primary instrument available to the World Academy of Art and Science to offer leadership to the world—leadership in thought that leads to action. When Charles I was deposed in England, the idea of democracy was conceived. Slowly it gained acceptance and now in the 21st century, it has spread around the world. The American War of Independence was fought on the basis that all men are born equal. The French Revolution was based on the ideas of freedom, equality and fraternity. The emphasis of Karl Marx on social equality found practical application in 1917, compelling capitalist nations to adopt more worker-friendly welfare policies out of fear of communism. In 1945 there were only 46 democracies. Today, there are 123.* Famine struck India in the year 1943 when she was still a subject nation. The absence of proper handling of the famine resulted in the loss of three million lives. After India gained Independence in 1947, the government’s efforts to increase food production yielded only minimal results. In the mid-1960s, FAO studied the food situation in India during a period of severe drought and forecast epidemic hunger leading to the loss of 10 million lives. The Food Minister of India conceived the idea of launching a nation-wide program to achieve national food self-sufficiency within five years. The nation was mobilized to realize that idealistic goal and achieved it. The Green Revolution was thus born. India doubled its food production in a decade and became a net food exporter.

The UN is a pioneering institution and evolutionary landmark in human history. Historically, great leaders have risen and established organizations around themselves. War became a global institution in the 20th century and it destroyed the institution of global empires. The League of Nations, proposed by President Wilson, proved ineffective in combating the global imperialist urge, but contained the seed for global government. The British Empire could have been converted into a global commonwealth had her persistent imperial ambitions not prevailed. But the imperialist urge was still very strong at that

* 2013 figure

time. France and Spain were narrow-minded in matters of religion in the colonies. Britain exhibited that same tendency towards Ireland. Wilson gave the lead but politics then was not a conducive foundation for a global organization. Such a foundation arose only after World War II essentially abolished the acceptability and utility warfare. Political leadership moved to the US and USSR and political immaturity of the world allowed for the formation of two rival blocs. While unity prevailed during the war, it did not survive afterwards to pave the way for global government. Still the formation of the UN, even though based on the veto power, can be considered a victory for peaceful co-existence. The Marshall Plan was introduced to economically help Western European nations recover from the damages of World War II, while strengthening the political influence of the USA. The Soviet Union understood that taking help from America would mean political subservience to that country. It refused the offer and recovered on its own financial strength and thereby preserved its independence. This attitude helped it become a superpower.

“Even when a crisis breaks out, economists try to solve the crisis by resorting to policies which are the source of the problem. Thus, unprecedented tax cuts for the rich are introduced at a time when inequality is at a hundred-year peak and has become a dangerous source of social unrest.”

Though politically not very powerful, the UN has accomplished considerably on many human fronts. The 17 SDGs that were unanimously adopted by the UN member-states are a remarkable achievement in the evolution of global society. They represent the shared aspirations of all humanity. These lofty goals cannot be achieved on the strength of the UN alone or even by the commitment of national governments. Achieving them will require a broad-based movement of the people of the world to organize themselves to achieve them. As India’s Green Revolution was embraced by the Indian society and turned into a social movement of the Indian population, achievement of the SDGs will require a grass-roots movement that engages the participation of the people of the world. It must be based on a total knowledge, objective knowledge of scientific technology integrated with subjective life knowledge representing emotional awareness of the external world and humanity’s aspiration for the future. An international organization or network of organizations representing the common aspirations of humanity is needed to project inspiring ideas based on total global thinking. Leadership of the future will rest with such an organization or network.

2. Specialization and Fragmentation of Thought and Life

Anything founded on the basis of unity has scope for growth. When that unity moves towards Integrality, the impetus for growth gets stronger. Mind operates by dividing reality into parts and regarding each as a whole in itself. It is an instrument of division. But its division is creative in that it expresses unity through division. In early civilizations, all life activities were centered on basic survival. Family, religion, production, festivals, trade, etc.

were all closely interlinked. As society became more sophisticated, each sector acquired a life of its own and began to develop independently of the others. Thus, trade, commerce, banking and other sectors each developed a life of its own. Such a division eventually led to segregated specialization and fragmentation of knowledge, institutions and activities. These divisions appear real to the mind that accepts them, but social reality remains undivided and integrated.

Current theories regard economy as a separate and independent sphere of activity, ignoring its inextricable linkages with politics, law, ecology, culture and the underlying forces of social power. Economics generally ignores the impact of subjective psychological and cultural factors on economic and social outcomes or applies simplistic assumptions far removed from the real world. This fragmentation has been stretched to the point of regarding finance as a field independent of the real economy. Financial theories have become abstract and remote from the real world, reduced to econometric formulas and computer algorithms with little relation to ground realities. And by a stroke of irony, these formulas are now being used to drive the economy they purport to reflect. Such a disconnect has prepared fertile soil for recurring economic crises. Even when a crisis breaks out, economists try to solve the crisis by resorting to policies which are the source of the problem. Thus, unprecedented tax cuts for the rich are introduced at a time when inequality is at a hundred-year peak and has become a dangerous source of social unrest. The more complex the crisis, the more innovative the counter-productive strategies become. Those who borrow far beyond their capacity for repayment constantly formulate new ways to ensure their success.

Disaster can only be prevented through education that fosters values. But few are the voices that recognize the urgent need for radical change in education. Integrated thinking is rare. The future leadership of the world should strive for that integrality by bringing such views together and generating solid ideas that lead to action. Education is the essence of social growth. The essence of human experience in physical activities and social interactions accumulates as knowledge in the Mind and is passed on to subsequent generations through education. Education has always preserved the underlying sense of unity about existence. The current fragmentation of knowledge and education threatens that perception of unity and needs to be countered by a conscious emphasis on a more integrated perspective before the fragmentation proceeds to even greater extremes.

In reality, specialization need not lead to fragmentation. It can serve the needs of integrality also. The problem arises when the underlying social unity is ignored, leading to imbalances, excesses and various forms of crisis. Fragmentation of social functions in government, business, education and other fields continues to grow today, but there does not seem to be any awareness of the problems it generates. Only a few thinkers in stray bursts of inspiration seem to recognize the fact that future growth depends upon forging integrality. European historians have now come to recognize the arbitrariness of the perceptual divisions through which they have been viewing the world, which served as a rationale for colonial

“Life is an organic whole. Even where it divides, it does so in such a way as to retain the underlying unity.”

imperialism and a catalyst for incessant warfare. Recently, they have begun to reshape their view of history from a more global, objective perspective that recognizes the contribution of other civilizations to human progress. Now the focus of attention has shifted from Europe to America and a similar distortion of reality and disproportionate importance are accorded to their temporary and waning dominance. Here too, an inherent intellectual bias distorts our understanding of current events.

3. Unity of Life Reflected in Literature

Over the past century, intellectuality, reductionism and specialization have come to dominate modern thinking. They generate ideas increasingly divorced from social reality, reduce complex phenomena to their infinitesimal component parts, and divide the organic social whole into separate mechanical elements. Even in the field of literary criticism, specialization, abstraction and reductionism have obscured the precious essence of life that literature depicts. For many centuries, the epics, poetry and fiction have been fundamental sources of both education and entertainment. Fragmentation has no place here. The knowledge communicated through enjoyment is stifled by dry intellectuality. Even the great Shakespearean critic, A. C. Bradley, fell victim to intellectual analysis when he claimed that the attack of the pirate ship in *Hamlet* was a flimsy dramatic device rather than a supreme act of creative genius by a great seer of life.

Life is an organic whole. Even where it divides, it does so in such a way as to retain the underlying unity. In the 18th and 19th century England, novels were mainly read by women. Serious people abstained from reading them. A novel entertains by the surprises and intensity depicted in its plot. Its characters reveal human nature in all its depths and dimensions. No other form of knowledge equals this power of literature. Thus, literary criticism made the study of human character a central tenet. But beyond human character lies the character of life. When literature reveals the character of life, readers are enthralled and receive knowledge as sensational education. Shakespeare created living characters who remain real to our imagination even today. This is not an education that any school or college can give. Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* entertains and retains its charm even 200 years after it was written, because it is full of insight into human character and the character of life. Lydia's elopement brings ruin on her family and makes her father, Mr. Bennet, suddenly aware of his own serious deficiency. He decides not to blame anyone for his misfortune and to shoulder full responsibility. He takes consciousness responsibility by accepting to bear the consequences even of other people's physical acts. He does not voice a complaint against anyone. Such responsibility raises other people's physical acts to the level of thoughts. Lydia's acts and Mrs. Bennet's initiatives are raised by his decision. Such mental elevation endows it with the power of life and it mobilizes everyone concerned with it. Darcy realizes the gravity of the situation, is mobilized into action and finds a way to get Lydia and Wickham married. It is a dramatic instance of the capacity of life to suddenly change course and reverse its outcome.

In our own lives, we are not conscious of how life responds to our own thoughts and attitudes. Though readers may overlook the true significance of events in a story, the knowledge great literature conveys is received subconsciously and has its impact. It is a

powerful form of subconscious education. The educative power of storytelling has been universally recognized. With the advent of videos, social education has become more organized and pervasive. This is one reason that today's youth are far more informed than previous generations, but society does not officially recognize the importance of this informal education.

4. Thought that Leads to Action

The Mind of the World gets organized when a thought is endorsed by the subconscious of the world. Such a thought will be powerful and lead to action. That is the task set for the mental leadership of the world. A dramatic expression of this power can be seen in German reunification. The German nation had long sought imperial status on par with other European countries. Its landlocked geography made overseas conquests difficult. Denied easy access, its ambition grew ever more intense, leading to two world wars. After World War II, the nation was divided into four parts. The three western parts were merged to form West Germany, while the eastern part fell into Soviet hands and remained separate. Its isolation was reinforced by the construction of the Berlin Wall. The circumstances which precipitated the sudden fall of the Berlin Wall have not been adequately explained to this day. When Germany's political ambitions were stifled, they were diverted into economic activity and she became the economic powerhouse of Europe. But her aspiration to this day is for political leadership. Her political aspiration will be realized only when she utilizes her economic superiority to promote the unity of the whole European Union rather than for competitive nationalistic aims. Creative, dynamic world leadership is needed in areas such as this.

In the distant past land was regarded as the only real form of property. The leadership of the nation arose from the aristocracy which owned land. That included the monarch himself. When trade and commerce developed, the center of power shifted to those in business who possessed monetary forms of wealth. Thus, America has come to rule the world. Global civil society advances on many fronts and progress comes in many ways, even through apparently negative and retrograde movements. Hitler's initiation of World War II to establish a German empire by force of arms ended centuries of incessant conflict on the continent, leading ultimately to the abolition of war and unification of Europe. Nuclear weapons have become useless because of their immense destructive power, leading to the strange situation in which even small states can threaten larger ones by the use of nuclear weapons, heralding the beginning of the end of use of physical force by nation-states.

As the discoveries of Quantum Physics challenged the premises of classical Physics, the complex, interconnected and interdependent global society of the 21st century presents challenges which the conventional theories, institutions and policies of sovereign nation-states are incapable of managing. Nor is it clear that even a global government would be capable of handling them effectively based on prevailing concepts. At most, a world leadership can formulate ideas which can be implemented by a world government. The foremost question is whether there are visionary world leaders with the capacity to formulate these ideas and establish such a government. Ideas that can lead to action are those that can precipitate the formation of a global government.

The same subject can be approached from the wider perspective of a theory of social evolution, which views humanity in the process of transition from the physical-vital to mental stage of civilization. This process is leading humanity to renounce war and terrorism and move on to diplomacy and rational thinking as its principal means of progress. When people act impulsively, they can never be rational.

Rationality implies adherence to truth, not personal preference, self-interest or one-sided viewpoint. Truth ensures rationality. We can conceive of a world leadership which thinks rationally.

*“Education
is leadership
in thought.”*

The world cannot be united by fragmentary ideas and theories. All academic disciplines need to overcome the fragmentation arising from over-specialization and restore the basic unity of thought. This is especially needed in the social sciences to integrate the disparate disciplines into a unifying science of society as WAAS is striving to do. Such a unifying thought can serve as the basis for effective action. International NGOs can accomplish at least this much. There are also MNCs that are moving beyond the mere pursuit of profit to think in terms of service to society. Google, Microsoft, Apple, Amazon and Facebook have discovered new planes of activity that unleash greater resources of society, opening up higher fields of service and instantaneous global communications. They have almost become indispensable global social institutions. These developments reflect a subconscious movement of society from selfishness to selflessness.

Future leadership should embrace these wider movements, base themselves on the unifying ideas they represent and unite them by a greater ideal. The ideas represented by these ideals are sufficiently powerful to initiate a world movement. Such a movement cannot issue from conventional thinking. It has to come out of new thinking, especially in the field of education. Education is leadership in thought. Education is a mental process with the power to move the body into action. In the past, there have been numerous occasions in which ideas have given rise to new and more powerful movements of action. Credit cards, microcredit and social networks are good examples. Cryptocurrency is another emerging opportunity with immense potential for action. It is up to the world leadership to discover the unifying perspective linking these thoughts and offer it to the world.

Author contact information

Email: ashokmirra@gmail.com