Chapter 1

- Value Crisis at the Individual Level
- Societal Level
- Intellectual Level
- Cultural Level
- The Way Out
The deepening value crisis in the contemporary Indian society is casting its evil shadow in all walks of our life. Even after fifty years of progress in different fields – economic, industrial, scientific, educational – it is doubtful if we are moving towards creation of a just society, a happy society, a good society. The promises of the ‘tryst with the destiny’, and the dreams of prosperity, social well-being and human happiness are proving to be false. The anguish over this disillusionment finds expression in so many ways, in literature, art, academic seminars, public discussions and in private conversations. They reflect the inner pain and frustration of sensitive individuals. However, these emotive expressions do not help much in understanding the nature of the crisis, its different dimensions, causes and possible remedies. In the absence of rational conceptualization of the problem, mere emotional reactions create a sense of fatalistic resignation. A large segment of our intelligentsia appears to be under the grip of such a pensive helplessness. The rest have retreated into the closed sanctuary of their own personal self-interests.

It is a daunting task to examine the nature of today’s value crisis in this gloomy climate. Yet, there is no escape from it either. One must grapple with it as best as one can. The pervasive crisis has many inter-related dimensions and interleaved layers. Any intellectual probing into it must first untangle this web to identify its main features so that they can be analysed and cognitively grasped. We begin this task by examining the nature of the value crisis in different spheres of our life. These spheres may be categorized as individual, societal, intellectual and cultural.
1.1 VALUE CRISIS AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

The sole aim of all the strivings at the individual level has become attainment of personal success. It is a worldly success, defined in purely materialistic terms as acquisition of money, power and prestige. The rat race to this success commands enthusiastic support of the powerful middle and elite classes. Their upbringing and enculturation have tuned them for single minded pursuit of career growth and economic success. All other life values which give meaning, worth and fullness to human existence, are seen as roadblocks and unnecessary diversions from the high road to material success.

Similarly, the concept of a good life has been restricted to very narrow confines. Good life is one with unrestricted enjoyment of sensuous pleasures and fulfillment of unlimited desires. It is a consumeristic haven filled with all kinds of artifacts for comfort and luxury. Its guiding slogan is, ‘higher the quantity of consumption, better the quality of life’. The new economic policies of liberalisation and globalisation have further propelled this ever aggressive march of consumerism. The economy is being opened to all kinds of objects of desire because the ‘ability to consume them has become the index of progress’.

This criticism of the commonly accepted notions of success and good life does not mean looking down upon the natural human inclinations for economic betterment, material comforts and enjoyment of life’s pleasures. They certainly are important components of a good life. But are they its only, or even the most significant, components? Are they the ultimate goals of human striving for happiness and fulfillment? The modern value crisis is mainly due to the excessive overplaying of the importance of material values of life, and consequent down playing of other life values like the moral, aesthetic and spiritual. Pavan Varma in his brilliant book, *The Great Indian Middle Class*, touches the heart of the matter with his remark:

For all the achievements of the Indian state in the last fifty years, there is, for its middle and elite classes, a crippling ideological barrenness which threatens to convert India into vastly unethical and insensitive aggregation of wants [Ref. 1, p. xii].
A related dimension of the value crisis is the increasing respectability of selfish individualism. It takes the form of exclusive concern for personal gains without any consideration for the common good. In every situation the guiding principle and the main question is, ‘what is in it for me?’ Such selfish persons use their friends, parents, relatives, and all other human relationships merely as means for personal advancement, without cherishing them or giving them much in return. They develop their talents, skills and knowledge, not because they make for a good person or a good society, but only to encash them at the opportune moment for gaining personal advantage. Such self-seeking, careerist ambitions are encouraged, even admired, by the modern professional and managerial class as the desirable virtues of motivation, goal-orientation, competitive spirit, etc. In marked contrast to this, there is another kind of individualistic personality; of those who refuse to submerge their individual identity in the tide of social and behavioural fashions of the day, who do not sacrifice their principles and values for pecuniary gains, and who are able to withstand unethical allurements of the work life and the psychological pressures of being the odd-man out. Alas, they are a vanishing tribe. And that is one sure indication of the value crisis in our society.

Another dimension of the value crisis at the individual level is the steep rise in the rights-consciousness, along with a steeper decline in the duty-consciousness. Protection of individual rights is an important requirement of social justice and democratic governance. It has been forcefully articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UNO, and in the Fundamental Rights of the Indian Constitution. Together with assertion of group rights, e.g., in trade union movements, woman’s liberation movements, farmers movements etc., they have made positive contributions in the march towards a just and egalitarian society. However, it is time to take note of the negative value implications of this growing tendency to make pursuit of rights an ism. Individuals and organized groups are making almost militant assertion of their rights, some real and some imaginary. The one aspect of democracy which seems to have caught the imagination of the people is the right to fight, in all possible ways, for the individual or group rights. All socio-political problems are being analysed in terms of rights of one class or another. In the
process the greater need for a harmonious balancing of rights with duties is being given a go by. No one is talking about the duties and responsibilities of individuals and groups, towards each other and towards the collective whole. The common ethical principle that the rights of one can be fulfilled only if others performed their duties seems to have been forgotten. The chapter on Fundamental Duties of the citizens, incorporated in the Constitution two decades back, has remained merely a cosmetic appendage with no influence on the course of national life.

The third dimension of this crisis is the common mentality of adopting double standards of value judgment, a much higher one for others and a much lower one for ourselves. Even the smallest mistakes of others do not escape our censorious scrutiny while we casually ignore or explain away our own wrongful conducts and malicious intentions. We refuse to accept any part of responsibility for the evils around us, let alone take initiative to do something about them. This duality of value standards also exhibits itself in the wide gap between profession and practice. The very persons who talk about high ideals, give frequent quotations in Sanskrit, exhort us to follow examples of national heros, stoop down to lowest levels of conduct for their own personal gains. And they have little qualm about it because it is generally accepted that words need not match deeds. This has generated a pervasive disvalue of mistrust in social intercourse where it is difficult to accept any statement on its face value. That there would be some gaps, some compromises between ideals and conduct in practical life is common sense. But we seem to have converted this pragmatism into a principle that this is how it ought to be. Such dualities, contradictions and perversions of value standards are the causes for the prevalence of stunted and fractured personalities, with little correlation between thought, speech and action, amongst a large class of our educated elite.

1.2 SOCIETAL LEVEL
The Indian society has traditionally been a group-oriented society. Although this group consciousness has generally been limited to caste, clan and village community, it did provide a counterbalancing communitarian pull to the tendency of selfish individualism. With
the ascendency of ideologies and isms like/individualism, consumerism, rights-ism, etc., this communitarian feeling has declined, particularly amongst the middle and the elite classes. Nor has it been replaced by a larger social consciousness which prompts the feeling of oneness with the society. It is this social consciousness which reminds us that all our individual attainments are derived from the society and have validity only in relation to it. We are entitled to fulfillment of our rightful expectations only when we perform our social duties and obligations efficiently and enthusiastically. It is this social consciousness which prompts individuals to work for the promotion of common social good, at least not to harm it for the sake of their individual gains.

This deadening of social consciousness has reduced our sensitivity to a variety of social evils like, poverty, injustice, exploitation, caste, class and gender inequalities, etc. The better endowed citizens, whose sensitivities and attitudes affect social transformation, have closed their eyes to these problems and have retreated into their own citadels of comfort and prosperity. Pavan Varma observes:

This insensitivity to poverty, specially amongst the influential, cannot but be an obstacle to the eradication of poverty, for unless a nation and society produce citizens who care, and not merely consumers who want, there cannot be a politically stable or economically resilient basis for prosperity [Ref. 1, p. xxi].

The realisation that even for our personal growth we have to fulfill our social obligations is one level of social consciousness. At a deeper level we identify more closely with our society when we say ‘it is my society’. This emotional identification serves the psychological need for a larger group identity. It generates a sense of pride in the achievements, the glory, and the common heritage of the society. This belongingness also creates a sense of responsibility for working towards removal of social inequalities, disharmonies and afflictions of various kinds. It nurtures the social virtues of care and concern. Without it society ceases to be ‘a web of social relationships’ for the nurturance of human values, human happiness
and human growth. It becomes a cold, numerical collectivity of individuals and groups, and worse still, a tension filled, strife torn, ruthless and oppressive system, governed by the jungle law of might is right. Lack of social consciousness and social cohesiveness are the major features of the contemporary value crisis at the societal level.

At the time of independence we gave ourselves a thoroughly enlightened and egalitarian Constitution for the creation of a good and a modern society. It promised to secure for all citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity. To realise these liberal humanistic values a new system of governance was adopted featuring parliamentary democracy, rule of law, balance of power between the executive, legislature and judiciary, legally enforceable fundamental rights of the citizens, etc. These concepts were markedly different from the prevalent societal values. No attempt was made to examine the underpinning values of the new system, to harmonise them with our own value system and to assimilate them into our societal and intellectual temper. Even the ruling elite classes, operating the system, have little sensitivity towards the values of the Constitution. The exercise of power and authority by the different organs of the state retained the arrogant and exploitative character of the colonial period. The sense of fairplay, concern for the common good, checks and balances to ensure accountability, could not be woven into the socio-political fabric.

Similarly, little was done to educate the new generations to develop their social consciousness, democratic temper and communitarian attitudes. As a result there is hardly any feeling of collective commitment towards the socio-political ideals of the Constitution. To quote Pavan Varma once again:

…the educated Indian has always seen democracy more as a means of voicing his demands, or asserting his rights, or registering his protests, and less as a system of accepting community obligations, or restricting unreasonable interests, or tempering freedom with responsibility [Ref. 1, p. 149].

The two most devalued words in our society today are politics and politician. Political pursuit has become unscrupulous manipulation for grabbing power and using it for selfish, partisan
ends. Political parties are organized less on the lines of ideologies and socio-economic programmes, and more on the basis of caste, religion, and regional identities. Instead of acting as a unitive force for reconciling narrow group interests they have become a divisive force, fanning fissiparous tendencies. Corruption, scams, nexus with black marketeers and criminals, have become the main features of the political character. The common citizen, who in theory is the sovereign in a democracy, is forced to remain a helpless, mute spectator to the open loot of public funds by politicians and conniving public servants.

In the last few decades our country has made significant progress in the economic field. The beneficial impact of the resulting material progress is visible everywhere. However, in the absence of distributive justice, the gains of economic progress have been cornered by the small upper class. The gap between the rich and the poor has widened resulting in increased social tensions and strifes. The new regime of liberalization and globalisation, mainly at the level of consumeristic market economy, is further widening the gulf between the have and the have-nots. The society has become divided into two classes, a small but economically and socially powerful class which is happily busy raising its living standards to the international levels, and the much larger but disempowered class which is condemned to remain deprived of even the minimum needs of a civilized life. In its crassly materialistic perceptions the new economic order has little place for human happiness. It is more of an economic barbarism based on the discredited Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest. It does not have even the faintest echo of the value based indigenous concepts of sarvodaya and antyodaya, as propounded by Gandhi and Vinoba.

The strongest value-base of the Indian society has always been the institution of the joint family. It was the cradle for inculcation of values of sharing and caring, of reconciling divergent needs and personalities, of subordinating individual interests to the collective interests of the family, of co-operative living. It took good care of the aged, the handicapped, and the not so bright members of the family. But in the new urban culture the joint family has broken up, partly because of the socio-economic pressures, and partly because of the rising individualism. In the unitary and the nuclear families,
the demands of career success and the necessities of consumeristic fulfillment leave little time and energy for value inculcation. Instead of being a social and human unit the family is becoming more of an economic unit where the child is conditioned to work single mindedly for career success, to meet the competition in all fields and to become worldly wise.

1.3 INTELLECTUAL LEVEL

The value climate of a society is closely linked to its intellectual temper. Its tone is set by writers, academicians, philosophers and other intellectuals. They do so by their critical examination of social and human situations, and through their creative efforts of generating new ideas and new solutions to human problems. The record of such intellectual efforts in the last fifty years is hardly inspiring. The contemporary intellectual temper is mainly critical, imitative and reactive rather than creative and proactive.

The fragmentation of knowledge into almost water-tight academic compartments is producing only narrowly focused specialists and super specialists. And this is true not only in the newer areas of science and technology but also in traditional liberal disciplines like arts and humanities. Even the philosophers have abandoned their professed task of ‘charting the total territory of life and its experiences’ [2]. Investigation of value issues of contemporary relevance seems to be no one’s job. In this intellectual vacuum the values and norms of society are being set by political leaders, business-persons, television personalities, writers of popular fiction, and even by film stars!

Another related feature of the modern intellectual temper is the divorce of virtues from learning. What is valued in the intellectual community is the stamp of degrees from prestigious institutions, the impressive list of publications, awards and recognitions, the linguistic and oratorial skills, and not the virtues of character as displayed in the personal and social conduct of academics. There is little evidence of virtues like intellectual honesty, humility and objectivity which were earlier considered the essential hallmarks of a true scholar.

At the intellectual level we feel shy of questioning the ruling, fashionable ideologies, particularly those originating from the West, concerning what constitutes the ends of the good life and what are
the means to that end. This confusion between means and ends is most glaring in our attitude towards science and technology. Instead of treating them as means for providing material conditions necessary for the pursuit of higher values of life, they have been elevated to the status of absolute values. Whereas all the intellectual and material resources of the community are committed to the growth and refinement of this means value, little thought is given to the end value of human happiness and growth. As Robert K. Merton remarks in his foreword to Ellul’s classical critique of technology, *The Technological Society*, “It is a civilization committed to the quest for continually improved means to carelessly examined ends” [3]. Though the remark was made over three decades ago for the Western society, it is equally applicable to our modern Indian situation.

The modern intellectual temper does not accord due importance to the exploration of aesthetic, ethical, spiritual and religious experiences of life. In their place it emphasises social ‘sciences’ like psychology, anthropology, sociology etc., as repositories of true, objective and hence valid knowledge of human nature and human societies. However, since they are sciences, by definition they exclude all normative aspects from their arena of enquiry. They are in search of ‘scientific’ laws which govern human behaviour and social intercourse. It is another kind of reductionism which reduces human nature and behaviour to only those aspects which are observable in the scientific sense and which can be explored by scientific ways of gaining knowledge. This approach does avoid the risk of incurring errors in arriving at conclusions, but then what is the worth of this certitude of knowledge in living a good life, in creating a good society and in developing into a good human being? As Schumacher remarks:

> To accept anything as true means to incur the risk of error. If I limit myself to knowledge that I consider true beyond doubt, I minimise the risk of error but I maximize, at the same time, the risk of missing out on what may be the subtlest, most important and most rewarding things in life [4].

One pole of the modern intellectual temper is the unquestioning adoration of science and anything which may be called scientific.
At the other pole is the attitude of unquestioned acceptance of patently irrational and superstitious beliefs like those in astrology, palmistry, psychic and supernatural powers of the so-called godmen. The mass hysteria over milk-drinking Ganesh, or stoppage of all trains on solar eclipse are two recent examples of such credulous behaviour. It is not only personal, semi-religious matters like deciding date and time of a wedding, but even purely secular and public matters like deciding date and time of filing the nomination papers for election, or tabling important resolutions in the parliament, that are being decided on the basis of auspicious position of stars. And all this in spite of the Constitution enjoining us to develop scientific temper as one of our fundamental duties. The one temper which we loose too often is the scientific temper!

1.4 CULTURAL LEVEL

In the words of Professor Devaraja, “All values pursued by man are comprehensible under terms culture and civilization” [Ref. 2, p.9]. The contemporary value crisis in the Indian society can therefore be best understood as a cultural crisis. This crisis is reflected in the confusing, ambivalent attitude of the educated Indians towards their culture. Indian culture is an unbroken living tradition spanning several millennia. In its evolution over this long span, with many ups and downs, it has generated a variety of ideas, philosophies, religious beliefs and social customs. One of the peculiar characteristics of this cultural tradition is its tolerance of these varieties. The newer strands of ideas over-layer the older ones without smothering them. Some have seen this tolerance as a virtue, constituting a ‘unity in diversity’. But to others the concurrent existence of a bewildering variety of ideas, many completely contradictory to each other, is frustrating – particularly to those who seek its human value contents relevant for modern day living.

One pole of modern attitude to Indian culture is the strong sense of pride in it. For a large number of persons it is an emotional response satisfying a psychological need for a cultural identity and a sense of belongingness. More commonly this identity is with smaller cultural sub-groups, based on language, religion and region. Yet, for most Indians there is a feeling of commonality and harmonious coexistence between these sub-groups. To a smaller
class this pride is based upon a conscious understanding and appreciation of the Indian world-view, its philosophy of life, with its strong spiritual undercurrent. To an extent this positive evaluation is also influenced by laudatory comments of some Western scholars. This has come into sharper focus since the recent 'paradigm shift' in modern sciences which have brought the Western intellectual thinking closer to Eastern mysticism. The strongest articulation of this shift is to be found in the writings of Fritjof Capra [5,6].

The other attitudinal pole is the modernist view that this ancient cultural tradition is more of a burden, a source of conflicts, and a hindrance to our progress into a modern society. Those subscribing to this viewpoint point to the progress made in the West by adopting modern science and technology, and more pragmatic and utilitarian socio-political ideologies. The modernists may have sharp ideological differences, for example between the liberals and the Marxists, but mostly they relegate value issues to a secondary place. In their view Indian culture should at best be preserved in museums as our cultural heritage and used for attracting tourists for earning foreign exchange.

At the popular level the most talked about point of current cultural crisis is the fast change in lifestyles, particularly amongst the urban middle class. Food habits, dress, forms of greetings, common courtesies, modes of entertainment, interpersonal relationships—particularly between members of opposite sex—have all changed. Some of these changes are due to changing socio-economic conditions but many are the result of copying Western modes. The media are constantly prodding us to accept these modern lifestyles. The youth belonging to the economically well-off class are particularly enamoured of the glamour, the fun and freedom promised by the modern culture. They reject traditional restraints on pursuit of sensuous pleasures as old fashioned and unnecessarily restrictive of their individual freedom.

At a deeper level cultural values are expressed through aesthetic sensibilities and their external expressions. They are reflected in the lifestyles also but more directly in music, art and literature. The appreciation and enjoyment of beauty have always been considered a necessary hallmark of cultured persons. The Indian value tradition puts it under *kama*, and celebrates it as one of the four *purusharthas*. The themes of traditional aesthetic expressions were based on deeper
level experiential truths of life. The serenity, harmony, as well as the joyous gaiety, the exhuberance of life, are well reflected in the traditional art and literary forms, and in folk arts. The modern art and literature however is more concerned with depiction of individual psychological impulses, passions, struggles and frustrations. In its more popular expressions, as in films, and TV, there is little of aesthetics and more of sex, violence and ugliness.

The cultural refinement of a society is best reflected in its ethical perceptions. They lead to formulation of moral codes for individual and social life, and articulation of general ethical principles on which these behavioural codes are based. In the Indian value tradition the word for it is *dharma*, which provides the regulating principles for the worldly pursuits of *artha* and *kama*, as well as guidance for spiritual pursuits. Conduct in accordance with *dharma* gives meaning and worth to human life. In Indian thought no human activity is separated from its moral implications. Therefore *dharma* is concerned with all aspects of life – individual conduct, family relations, social life, public administration, political life, etc. It has a wider ecological connotation of supporting the welfare of all beings, not just human beings. *Dharma* defines and clarifies the virtues of *sadguna* and *sadachara*, duties and responsibilities. However the greatest tragedy of the contemporary life is that ethics has been banished from *dharma*. Devoid of its continual *dharmic* nurturance, ethics has become mere observance of customary morality in the modes of interpersonal relations. Its wider demands of sharing, caring, and of responsible conduct have gone out of focus. At best ethics has been reduced to its primary level of personal honesty, sexual morality, and fulfillment of familial obligations. It has not developed into a social and cultural force to meet the challenges of the contemporary life.

On the other hand *dharma* without ethics has been reduced to a matter of personal belief in the existence of God and fear of His overpowering influence in human affairs. This belief has little visible correlation with any urge to become a good human being and to create a good society. *Dharmic* pursuits are confined only to performing prescribed *poojas*, rituals, going to temples, observance of fasts etc. Even these are mostly done to ward off evil forces, to gain some selfish end, or to earn merits in the after-life, and not out of any internal commitment.
In the modern English educated society the word dharma is used mostly as a synonym for religion. The harm caused because of this intellectual confusion has been well commented upon by Chaturvedi Badrinath [7]. In its political sense religion has become a basis for differentiating and dividing the society. This religious division foments the feelings of ‘we’ versus ‘they’, and has caused much hatred, violence and strife. To aggravate them and to encash upon these divisions for political gains appears to be the main motive behind the misleading but vociferous claims and counterclaims of secularist and anti secularist lobbies in our political life.

The fundamental basis of any culture is its perception of external and internal reality, its world view, its theory of natural order and the place of human beings in it, its philosophy of life and the ethico-spiritual values developed in the light of this philosophy. They evolve through a process of inner contemplation and conscious analysis of life experiences. In the Indian culture this search for values has been carried out by its seers and sages and expressed in its vast wisdom literature, the shastras. Ignorance of this literature is the ignorance of Indian culture. Behind much of the accumulated moss of millennia, and outer profanities, they contain profound gems of wisdom. These can be adopted as the guiding lights for systematic development of human values for a good life and a good society. In their universality they have relevance not only for the Indian society but for the whole of human society. What is needed is their creative reconstruction for evolving a value frame for resolving modern value problems.

This respectful evaluation of one’s own cultural roots should not, and does not, mean denigration of other cultures. Cultural chauvenism has always been inimical to the growth of human civilization, and frequently the cause of tyranny and violence. The evaluation of Indian culture should be done in terms of its capacity to contribute towards evolution of a global human culture. At this level the universal components of other cultural traditions become different strands of the common human culture, and hence become the common heritage of all. It is only through such an open and inclusive attitude of multi-culturalism that we can overcome the problems of inter-cultural conflicts. That would be the true realisation of the value of संतुलन कुटुंबम्, i.e., the view which considers the whole world as one single family.
The conflict between modernity and tradition is a recurring theme in the cultural value crisis. As commonly conceived modernity is a repudiation of tradition, a complete break from it. In the Indian social context it is popularly seen as flouting of traditions and customs, decrying the spiritual and glorifying the materialistic view of life, and adopting Western lifestyles. Even at the intellectual level, sometimes consciously but often unconsciously, modernisation is taken to mean Westernization. It is the Western intellectual tradition, its social philosophy, economic and political institutions, its scientific, technological and industrial models, which are presented as the ideals for a modern society. This colonisation of mind, a tragic bequest of the past, still conditions our intellectual temper and our cultural attitudes.

At the opposite pole are the staunch traditionalists who consider ancient Indian tradition as the acme of all human achievements. In their view Indian philosophical insights have discovered the ultimate truths of life and reality, and its value tradition contains all the answers to all the problems of life. The present cultural crisis is merely because we have deviated from our own cultural traditions. Many traditionalists are so engrossed with the past that they have little care for the present and the future. In their view to move forward we have to constantly look backwards! Commenting on this tendency Jawaharlal Nehru wrote:

We become prisoners of the past and some part of its immobility sticks to us [8].

1.5 THE WAY OUT

The way out of this crisis will have to be negotiated between various opposing perceptions, ideas and attitudes about life-values. It will require creative intellectual effort of the highest order. It will also need all the wisdom that we can marshal. Therein lies our greatest weakness. The curse of centuries of political subjugation, economic exploitation and cultural stagnation is not so much in the defilement of the socio-economic order but in crushing out the spirit of rational enquiry from our intellectual temper. Much against the hopes of Tagore, ‘the streams of human reason’ are ‘lost in the dreary desert sand of dead habits’. As a modern nation but with an ancient
civilisation we are not able to meet the new challenges in the social, political, economic and cultural fields because of our lack of self confidence and creative capacities. Merely imitating and parodying Western ideologies and models of growth is hardly the way to achieve the ideals of a good society, a good life and a good human being. Nor will it be of much help to eulogise and harp on the ancient Indian spiritual values of renunciation and resignation in the face of strong and valid human urges of achieving better standards of life and social justice.

The crisis situation demands vigorous exploration and generation of new ideas in all dimensions of life values—social, aesthetic, ethical and spiritual. Collectively they can all be put under the umbrella term ‘Human Values’. Its core philosophical concepts would require creative synthesis of the modern humanist and communitarian thoughts on human life and society, and the holistic Indian world view. These philosophical musings should not be left at the level of refined abstraction. They should be developed into a living value tradition for the guidance of life in all fields. The core concepts of human values will be universal in nature but their development into practical principles for guidance of individual and collective life would necessarily be culture specific. As the modern Indian value tradition it would have to be mindful of our history, both recent and ancient, and our social and cultural specificities. This value tradition must have the dynamism to ever reinvigorate and rejuvenate itself through a process of constant examination, re-examination, refinement, assimilation, and creation of new values. Only such a modern value tradition will have the power to positively intervene in, and direct the course of our national development.

Who will bring about this new value revolution? Our traditional institutional structures for value generation and transmission, the gurukulas and the ancient universities, decayed long ago. So did the tradition of moral and social philosophers and the smritikaras who gave us various dharma shastras, nitishastras and arthashastras. In this tradition, the rules of conduct for personal and social life, the duties and responsibilities of persons in different walks and stages of life, were periodically revised, taking into account the changing social needs, and new insights into the nature of values. It is this noble human spirit of progress, based on continuous refinement of
socio-cultural processes and philosophical enquiry into the nature of good life, and the whole spectrum of human values, that needs to be revived today. It would be pathetic to seek solutions for modern problems in ancient prescriptions meant for an all-together different socio-cultural milieu.

Most of the leaders of the Indian renaissance, and of the freedom movement, derived inspiration for their social and political activism from the classical Indian value tradition. They contributed to its growth through their reinterpretations and extensions into public life. Tilak declared ‘freedom is my birthright’ on the basis of Gita. Sri Aurobindo gave a call for human unity on the basis of the common spiritual essence of mankind. Mahatma Gandhi made satya and ahimsa the corner stones for his entirely indigenous theory of social, political and economic reconstruction of society. Unfortunately their appeals to idealism and calls for resurgence of human values quickly evaporated soon after their departure. The intellectual temper of the independent India did not find such value orientation of much practical use, although we still pay occasional lip service to it from public platforms.

Waiting for the emergence of charismatic personalities or the promise of incarnations of the divine, सम्प्रदाय सुसंस्कार, is one way of hoping for value progress. But a surer way for a mature society relying on human capabilities and self-confidence would be to institutionalise the process of value enquiry and value education. This is what the rishi-parampara and the ancient universities of the bygone days did. As their successors this task rightly belongs to the modern day universities. They ought to be the centres for value enquiry in all fields, for conceptualising the nature of goodness in the good man, good society and good life, and for generating new ideas to meet the value challenges for today and tomorrow. Sadly though, they have become merely centres for conducting examinations and awarding degrees. At best they are places for information transmission, or for narrowly focused training in some useful skills for human resource development. Precious little is being done to help character formation, to instill an ethic of responsibility to work for creation of a good society, and to develop the value of human sensitivity in the youth. It is the social and ethical competence of the educated elite, which will largely determine the quality of life in the modern society. Therefore, the most important strategy for
combating the present value crisis would be a comprehensive scheme of value education at all levels – primary, secondary and university. As Sarvapalli Radhakrishan puts it crisply,

Education is not only imparting information or training of skills, It has to give the educated a proper sense of values [9].

Developing value consciousness has been the central theme in the traditional Indian concept of education. This view is now being reflected at the international level also. UNESCO’S International Commission on Development of Education has titled its report of 1972 as, “Learning to be”, to be a complete human being. “The physical, intellectual, emotional and ethical integration of the individual into a complete man is a broad definition of the fundamental aim for education” [10]. We could enlarge the statement to include the whole spectrum of life values – social, aesthetic, ethical, spiritual, and human values.

Value education is particularly important for students of professional and technical courses like, engineering, management, medicine, law etc. Acquisition of specialised knowledge and skills empowers them in the original sense of Bacon’s phrase, ‘knowledge is power’. Such empowerment, without proper understanding of the wider social and human context of their professions, and a commitment to use this power in a responsible manner for human welfare, is potentially dangerous. These specialists may exploit their knowledge and power for personal gains at the cost of the common good, or may become tools of exploitative commercial and political forces. Value education for them should be inspirational without being religious or sectarian. The appeal should be to a rational appreciation of universal human values rather than to a particular belief system. Then only can we create a value climate which will encourage emergence of good human beings, and a good society.

References