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Anisur Rahman

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**SHAPING
THE
FUTURE**

Globalization

The emerging ideology in the popular protests and grassroots action research¹

Anisur Rahman

I felt that I had found my religion at last, the religion of Man, in which the infinite becomes defined in humanity and came close to me so as to need my love and co-operation ('The Vision', Rabin-dranath Tagore, 1999).

ABSTRACT

The last century, intense with dreams and major social experiments, has ended with a general collapse of initiatives for social transformation, and also total disillusionment with efforts for 'development' of so-called 'developing' nations. The victorious ideology of the day – capitalism – has sought to consolidate its triumph with a call for 'globalization', for the freeing of markets, for unchecked hunting by private capital within and across nations with total disregard for national and global welfare. For a period no answer to this was in sight, until at the turn of the century the global protest movement rekindled the torch of resistance. It is now appropriate to review where we are today and the task that lies ahead of us. With this end in view this article will look back at the experiments in and efforts for social change to draw enlightenment from them, review where we are today, trace elements of the new ideology that is emerging in the protest movement, and reflect upon the task ahead for grassroots social activism.

KEY WORDS

- Action Research
- development
- globalization
- participation

Experiments in social change and development

Since the beginning of known human history, sages, prophets and philosophers have called for a more humane civilization than has prevailed at any given time. They have called for a more just social order, an order no less caring for human values than for the pursuit of material wealth. The calls have been in vain. Over the last two centuries, Marxism, calling for radical action to liberate the oppressed and exploited and to promote the communal spirit in social life, inspired social and political action across the globe. This resulted in great convulsions in a number of societies and a world threatening arms race between powers for and against such change. But changes inspired by this ideology have nowhere yielded a social order that does justice to the vision, and edifices built upon major social upheavals for such change have finally collapsed.² This has put the radical camp in disarray, and left humankind without an alternative ideology with a credible operational content to challenge the ruling faith.

On the 'liberal' side, the last half century has seen the rise and fall of a faith in 'development' that mobilized thinking and action on a world scale. The call of 'development' promised prosperity to 'developing' nations without radical social upheavals. Development discourses swept the social sciences and national and international establishments; foreign 'development assistance' flowed to 'developing' countries to hasten the promised prosperity; and state powers swelled to deliver the product. Definition of the product was monopolized by economists who put aggregate economic growth as the supreme measure with distribution concerns raised, intermittently, as a secondary consideration. To the broad masses of people in the 'developing' countries this 'trumpet and march' has signified very little except alienation from their indigenous search for life. In the aggregate no significant dent on the material condition of the people has resulted while economic and social inequalities have skyrocketed. Social corruption and crime have grown alarmingly, usurping resources mobilized domestically as well as internationally in the name of development, a race in which the political elite and state organs have given impressive leadership. For a time the 'South-east Asian miracle' appeared like a breakthrough, only to nose dive to reveal the extreme vulnerability of such flights. Today there is little left of the faith in 'development', although national and international establishments and mainstream economists continue to use the rhetoric, promising now that while state efforts have failed the 'free market' is the best way for nations to 'develop'.

'Poverty alleviation' and the 'cheap labour' ideology

In the hands of the protagonists of 'development', the definition of the 'product' has now taken a rather curious turn. Economic growth remains the leading indi-

cator. Concern for distribution equity has been virtually abandoned in the reverence for the competitive pursuit of private interest, acclaimed as the main stimulation for growth. In its place we find a loud concern for 'poverty alleviation'. The measure of poverty is based on a set of presumed 'basic needs' of life, an absolute measure that ignores human aspirations and the misery derived from one's *relative* material status in society. The irrelevance of such an absolute notion of poverty is easily demonstrated by the fact that in general, people on or near the 'poverty line' do not spend their full income on the prescribed 'basic needs', but spend part of their income on other needs as well. Thus, they are unable to meet the prescribed 'basic needs' even though they are no longer technically 'poor' (!). This demonstrates that they have other vital needs to which they give priority at the margin with their 'poverty line' income that therefore warrant inclusion in the concept of 'poverty'. It is also well known that some of these other needs are derived from the demonstration of 'higher' consumption standards from which, therefore, the concept of 'poverty' cannot be isolated. In fact, the notion of poverty emerged from the inequality between wealth and consumption: this notion did not (and does not) exist for egalitarian communities (nor for old man 'Adam', the first human being on earth who indisputably was far below the 'poverty line'!), even if their material status is below the 'poverty line' of modern economic discourse. Hence the notion of poverty, by genesis as well as in the perception of the people concerned, is a relative notion, and hence poverty can never be alleviated within the framework of gross inequalities in wealth and consumption.

Such a concern for poverty alleviation in a minimalist and static sense amounts in effect to a concern for maintaining the ordinary people's productivity of labour, as if they are nothing but 'livestock' to be fed and sheltered at the barest minimum so that the privileged in society can appropriate their surplus, essentially confirming the Marxist theory of exploitation! From the point of view of rigorous accounting this 'livestock' notion of poverty provides only for *maintenance* of 'human capital', and the real question of distribution of social income comes in fact *after* this provision! Universalization of this notion of poverty and of a concern for 'poverty alleviation' only in this maintenance sense signifies, indeed, the final ideological triumph of capitalism. And the underprivileged themselves are being manipulated to internalize this ideology by being labelled as 'poor', notwithstanding the human qualities they possess (see Rahnema, 1990).

One may see the import of such concern for 'poverty alleviation' in the strategy of development that 'globalization' implies: the flow of international capital to exploit cheap labour in 'developing' countries, promising on the one hand greater employment to their people to alleviate their 'poverty' with low wages, and on the other hand, high returns to capital thus flowing to a cheap-labour country. This is the essence of the rationalization of 'globalization' for world development, where client nation states are being purchased with so-called

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'development assistance' which develops an infrastructure to facilitate private entrepreneurship, with the condition that they open up their capital and labour markets to international capital so that their cheap labour can be exploited.

Ironically, mass poverty even in this 'livestock' sense has persisted unabated despite the shift toward privatization, and we have entered the new century with international and national establishments completely at a loss as to its solution. Like the 'decades of development' which followed one after another, 'poverty alleviation', even as a bare subsistence concept, has also served more as a constantly recycled slogan than as a reality (United Nations Development Programme, 2000). Meanwhile, 'poverty' is selling rather well to keep bringing external resources to the concerned countries for its purported alleviation, helping the elite in such countries in their bid to catch up with modern consumption standards, a chase that also suits the interest of international capital by creating markets for its ostentatious goods.

With all this a crisis of moral values is being experienced, with rising personal crimes and institutional abuse of power to be checked mainly by law-and-order machineries which have themselves collapsed in integrity. As Heller said in his contribution to the Cartagena Congress 'Institutions of ethical power' are fast eroding (Heller, 1998). And the electoral choices of people are getting reduced to choices between opposing political forces unscrupulously using money and terrorism in their bids for power and anxious to loot and plunder social wealth and international assistance resources rather than provide responsible guardianship to society.

The economic deprivation of the bulk of the world's population and the shedding of moral values by guardians of societies are together strengthening religious fundamentalism, to which the establishments are giving only a law-and-order response instead of credible guardianship toward meeting people's aspirations which is the surest way to deal with this problem.

To this should be added the persistence of the phenomenon of male domination perpetuating oppression and violence upon women – denying half of the human race equal status as humans – a sad commentary by itself on the male-ruled human civilization. And finally, the ecological ravage of the earth in the pursuit of private greed is outraging the sense of an organic relation between mankind and nature as well as progressively threatening the very survival of life on the planet.

The enlightenment and awakening

I present this scenario not as one of despair but as one of enlightenment. For those who have wanted radical social change we are enlightened today that mere structural change does not end domination, nor for that matter does it transform evil

into good – there is a question of values to be promoted which have on the whole been overlooked in radical discourses. We also now know that ‘revolutionary vanguards’ do not necessarily get ‘de-classed’ and might like to enjoy ‘class’ privileges once in positions of power. More basically, individualist urges, once they take root in the culture of a society, may not easily disappear, and the radical vision of a ‘communist man’ to re-emerge from an ‘individualist man’ may have more preconditions than a mere ‘class revolution’.

The last century has been particularly generous in revealing these insights to the human race, calling for the dispensing of some basic illusions that have inspired many committed actions toward radical social change. As for ‘liberals’, the last half century’s efforts have also taught us that societies cannot be ‘developed’ by channelling resources into the hands of ‘middlemen as agents of development’ (e.g. functionaries of state or other development agencies). There is no reason why individualist urges will not operate in such agents to distort results in favour of themselves and their clientele rather than of the intended beneficiaries.

Finally, the male instinct for domination, over women as well as over nature (see, for example, Capra, 1983), appears deep-rooted irrespective of the economic and political structure of societies, and does not promise to disappear without sustained social education and struggle.

But through and in reaction to all this, one positive force has also advanced: the awareness of democracy, human rights and social and ecological justice. Totalitarianism, where it still reigns or raises its head, does so without any pretence of righteousness, and the ‘voice of the people’ when it expresses itself anywhere claims an intrinsic legitimacy. Human rights – including women’s rights – movements as well as movements for environment care are being more assertive than ever before. Even the USA, which has led the world in articulating democracy in concept and practice, has in recent times demonstrated a growing disillusionment with its political institutions and a questioning of the real meaning of democracy. Finally, voices against corporate dominance which have been sporadic for some time past (and mainly outside the USA) have crystallized into a concerted popular protest movement in the very ‘heart of the empire’ and participated in by people coming from all over the world. In this, for the first time, organized labour, farmers, human rights activists, environmentalists, students, youth, the aged and mothers have joined hands in solidarity against corporate power. Through these protests positive human values are expressing themselves with unexpected intensity: in Seattle against the WTO (November 1999); in Washington against IMF and the World Bank (April 2000); in Philadelphia and Los Angeles at the Democratic and Republican Conventions (August 2000); and in the associated networking that is spreading through, for example, the World Social Forums in Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2001–2003 (and in 2004 in Mumbai, India); and the worldwide popular protests against the USA/UK invasion of Iraq

in 2003. This confirms that despite setbacks in previous efforts, popular awareness of the need for fundamental change has widened as well as deepened. It is this overall awakening and ascendance of positive awareness and assertive popular action that give us hope for the future.

Elements of the emerging new 'ideology'

From this movement, grassroots social activism by way of action research may take renewed strength as it may wish to rearticulate its vision and tasks. At present, in the absence of a clearly articulated ideological alternative to capitalism, grassroots social activism has become essentially of a local or specific issue-based character without much significance for fundamental social change. Peoples and nations must, of course, be free to choose their own ideologies in search of their own self-realization, and ideological diversity also enriches human life on this planet. But a search for one's own ideology is enlightened by exchanges; mankind also needs to search for some fundamental principles of healthy cohabitation *to give the strength of solidarity to the very flowering of diversity* (cf. Alli Chaggi-Starr, in Guilloud, 2000, p. 56), and there are also basic urges that are innate to human beings. The popular protest movement is already suggesting urges of an 'ideological' character in this fundamental sense, and it should be important to trace them in a search for deeper articulation and for wider exchanges on the question. Voices from the movement and analytical reflections on it (Albert, 2000; Beiser, 2000; Featherstone, 2000; Guilloud, 2000; Henwood, 1999; Mokhiber & Weissman, 2000; Smith, 2000) suggest at least six such elements.

First, as already suggested, a deeper meaning of democracy is being sought which is more than just the periodic party-based contests, using fair or foul means, for people's votes to choose society's rulers. The urge is unmistakably toward some form of democracy in which:

- a) society would be consulted on vital questions as and when they arise, and elected people's leaders would be accountable to the people for specific major actions and not merely present themselves to an overall 'pass' or 'fail' judgement in periodic elections; and
- b) power would be decentralized so as to give the maximum collective 'self-rule' to local communities.

The call for democracy has been extended to the global level as well, demanding substantive democracy in the decision making of supranational institutions. In the context of this awakening of a search for the essence of democracy it is noteworthy that the ongoing protest movements themselves have followed organizing and decision-making methods that show an exemplary commitment to 'participatory democracy' – networking without centralized leadership, and decision

making on key questions by consensus and without pressures, leaving constituent groups to adopt specific action strategies by their own creative responses to specific situations.³

Secondly, the awareness of the protests is clearly against concentration of global and national wealth and demanding 'equitable' sharing of wealth and incomes in a bid for social and global justice. In particular, the 'New Student Movement' in the USA (Featherstone, 2000), is passionately denouncing the wealth gap, in the USA as well as globally, and is signing people up to fight for global economic justice. This is a demand that it is not typically in the character of the 'free market' to fulfil. Indeed, the concentration of economic power is the fundamental source of the plight of humanity and of the planet's ecology, and in the true spirit of democracy this vital question of distributive justice ought to be settled through social dialogue and consensus and not by any 'invisible hand' working surreptitiously behind the scenes.⁴ The protest movement is also calling for 'fair trade', a concept with an ethical overtone that perhaps needs to be operationalized in specific cases by consensus rather than by economic theory alone. It is also argued that instead of pursuing an export-led development policy, developing countries should concentrate on developing productive capacity to meet local needs (Mokhiber & Weissman, 2000).

Thirdly, labour (i.e. people) is demanding *fulfilling* work and not just 'gainful employment'. This natural human aspiration is ignored in received economic theory, which has presumed gains in income alone as the motivation for labour (without having ever asked labour), regarding this principal activity in life as a necessary cost to be incurred to gain income. The demand for fulfilling work calls, therefore, for a paradigmatic review of the premises of economic theory. It also calls for a review of the notion of 'basic needs' in development discourses in order to incorporate the human urge for labour which leads to self-realization or enrichment of life – creative labour (Rahman, 1993, p. 225) – or labour exercised in an environment of enriching human relation and exchange. In turn, this asks for a fundamental reconsideration of indicators of societal progress or 'development' vis-à-vis the ruling paradigm that is preoccupied with growth of social income without consideration of the nature of labour one expends to earn income. Finally, this also questions the conventional notion that 'poverty', in the sense of unsatisfied 'basic (*human*) needs', can be alleviated simply by sufficiently 'gainful' employment without consideration of the nature of the work undertaken. Amartya Sen's dual concept of 'entitlement' and 'capability' to choose one's mode of life (Sen, 1982) overlaps with this view.

Fourthly, environmental care, which was not in the orthodox agenda for social change is today a vital concern of enlightened visions of life on the planet and has been a central concern of the protest movements.

To the above explicit ideological urges of the protest movement may be added two implicit ones as follows.

While the protest movement has been specifically targeted against corporate power and greed resulting in economic and environmental injustice, gender equality, which is already on the agenda for social change, has asserted itself in the movement through women having played major and frontline roles in it – asserting their equality by exercising it.

Finally, the fact of students and youth taking prominent roles in the protests is a testimony that the future is not satisfied that its interest is safe in the hands either of the state – which in the neo-classical economic literature has been viewed as the trustee of the future but which has abdicated this responsibility and is also being asked to do so by the call of ‘globalization’ – or of the market, or, for that matter, of the elders in society. The demand, though implicit, is clear that youth as direct representatives of tomorrow should have a say in social decision making that affects the future.

The task and principles of grassroots activism

Social change is a political process. But the credibility of political activism is rather low at this stage, with the Left unable yet to reemerge with a convincing ideological perspective, leaving the field for the Right to play it alone with deceitful slogans of ‘democracy’, ‘poverty alleviation’ and ‘globalization’. This has widened the space, in general, for ‘civil’ social activism as this also charges such activism with greater responsibility. In view of the above popular voices and urges emerging from the protests I suggest an important task for grassroots civil activism today is to help promote the empowerment of people – the subaltern, underprivileged, oppressed people – toward their democratic participation and voice in society in order to realize their human urges as well as to enhance their contribution to and involvement in the search for a deeper articulation of an ideological vision of a more humane world.

The fact that participatory democracy is a central concern in the emerging ideological urges especially invites ‘participatory action research’ (PAR) to lead in this task. For this, PAR may wish to review and restate its principles of grassroots intervention to contribute to both local and global change. The following principles may be suggested or reaffirmed for PAR and for that matter for progressive grassroots social activism in the days ahead of us.⁵

People’s autonomy and ‘uglolana’ (‘sharpening each other’)

Needless to say, grassroots work to promote people’s voice and their contribution to the search for an ideology for change must be in the framework of a ‘subject–subject’ relation as espoused by PAR, with complete autonomy of the people to express themselves through their own thinking and action. This is unfortunately

not obtained in many grassroots work. In particular, work of the 'NGO' variety is predominantly of a 'development-delivery' or 'poverty-alleviation' character, creating a 'benefactor-beneficiary' relation with the people and preoccupied with hierarchical concepts like 'target groups' and 'training' which are not conducive to independent thinking and action by their 'clientele'. Conceptually, 'liberal' notions of the elite having the responsibility of 'developing' the people with a pretension of superior knowledge, and the radical pretensions of 'advanced consciousness' of 'revolutionary intellectuals' are untenable and have done immense harm to the liberation and development of people's intellectual and creative potentials. On the other hand, there is much to be gained on both sides through an enriching interaction respecting each others' autonomy of inquiry and action: between outside activists carrying scientific knowledge, knowledge of the working of macro- and global structures and of struggles for change elsewhere; and popular knowledge, experience, intellect and creativity. The desired relation between external activists and people is best expressed by the term 'uglolana' in the vernacular vocabulary of the South African Bantu communities, meaning 'sharpening each other' – one of the deepest concepts I have myself learnt from the most ordinary people (Rahman, 1993, ch. 12). A companion concept in the same vocabulary is 'uakana', meaning 'to build each other'. Together, these two concepts – 'uglolana' and 'uakana' – are the profoundest articulation of the participatory development paradigm that I could think of, an articulation of the people themselves which we have bypassed with our hierarchically oriented education and training.

Liberating education and social literacy

In such a joint search for enlightenment, action researchers have the very important responsibility of helping in the advancement of social literacy (and not merely alphabet literacy) of the people, by methods of 'liberating education' (i.e. by collective *self-inquiry* of the people avoiding hierarchical teaching). Social literacy is vital as a foundation of empowerment. Indeed, a fundamental urge of human beings is the urge to understand one's position in the milieu of peoples – local, national and global – an existential question of no less profundity and intensity than the scientist's urge to understand the position of the human in celestial space. The alienation derived from the opaqueness of this phenomenon is deeply de-empowering. One's empowerment in society, in fact, begins with the beginning of critical understanding of this question – a basic *human* need as distinct from the *material* 'basic needs' with which development discourse has preoccupied itself. The Freirian method of 'conscientization' as well as methods of collective social inquiry by the people initiated in PAR has contributed much to the methodological development of liberating education. While the concepts of liberating education and social literacy are widely recognized and professed in

recent times in grassroots/community work, the practice in many cases leaves much to be desired. Words like ‘conscientization’ and ‘participatory research’ are being ‘co-opted’ to transfer knowledge and ideas from outside. Conscientization is a process of critical self-inquiry and self-learning and of thereby developing the confidence and capability to find answers to questions on one’s own. It is not necessary for this to mechanically follow any method of ‘conscientization’, Freirian or otherwise – modern pedagogy of education has by now absorbed such contributions to liberating education and calls for creative exploration of ways to animate and promote collective self-learning by both ‘teacher/facilitator’ and learners.

Working toward synergy and developing voice of the people

In many countries action research agencies, singly or together, are working at multiple locations but their work may not be ‘adding up’ beyond the arithmetic. Systematic interaction and networking between people’s groups in grassroots work within as well as across countries can add a synergy to such work with much positive fallout. This includes developing a voice of the people over a broader space and transcending the work of individual initiating/facilitating agencies, at the same time strengthening all grassroots groups with a sense of wider solidarity and enriching them all in their search for ideological perspective. (These questions of scale and networking have been extensively addressed in another context by Gustavsen, 2001, 2003.)

Principles of material assistance

Treating the people as ‘poor’ and therefore as objects of patronizing assistance, as so much grassroots work is doing, inhibits the development of an independent, assertive and responsible personality of the people, so important to enabling their best contribution to the task of social change. I suggest that progressive grassroots work dispense altogether with the term ‘poor’ and with talk of ‘poverty alleviation’. Men and women are not born to solve their problem of poverty, nor for others to solve this for them – they are born to show what stuff they are made of through their personality and actions in whatever situation in life they face. And they will show their best when this ‘stuff’ becomes their self-identity to give them a positive self-esteem. As I wrote on a previous occasion, ‘there can be no development (which is endogenous) unless the people’s pride in themselves as worthy human beings inferior to none is asserted or, if lost, restored’ (Rahman, 1993, ch. 12). No country has been able to solve its problem of ‘poverty’, however it is defined, by identifying it as the problem to be solved, essentially because this puts the people in the position of ‘beneficiaries’ of patronizing action by those who are then able to trade the people’s poverty for their own aggrandisement. In

order to perpetuate this relation an 'invisible hand' works to perpetuate poverty rather than to alleviate it. We need people to experience themselves as worthy human beings, not only to develop and obtain justice for themselves, but also in order that they contribute their best to the search of wider humanity for its highest self-expression.

This calls for careful assessment of ideas for material assistance to the people. Some communities in very special situations at special times may need some immediate assistance, and such assistance may be given as a humanitarian act. But I suggest that beyond such special situations certain principles of assistance in grassroots work be kept in view that aim to contribute to fundamental change and to empower human values rather than 'bodies' of people as such (to pursue merely their *partisan* interests). The best traditions and thinking of grassroots social activism suggest some of these principles as follows:

- animate the people to form solidarity groups for mutual care and cooperation without any promise of material assistance;
- emphasize promotion of collective self-help rather than waiting for outside assistance in areas where the people can help themselves;
- charge the people to avoid exploitative practices themselves, e.g. usurious money-lending, and exploitative trade practices (taking advantage of the lower bargaining power of the other party, submitting to community ethics about terms of such dealings);
- ask for commitment from the people to becoming self-reliant vis-à-vis outside help and to collective self-monitoring of progress in this respect;
- encourage people to support locally produced goods rather than imported goods to stimulate local production and reduce the need for exports, raise local incomes and uphold indigenous culture;
- stimulate the development of community ethics ('institutions of ethical power') and ways of its enforcement (by way of both cultural norms of social conduct as well as communal institutions like 'people's law' and 'people's courts');
- give 'loans', rather than grants ('charity'), to be repaid in some form or other, if not directly to the lending agency then to 'humanity' by way of community development work, helping toward empowerment of other people in the neighbourhood, and contributing to wider progressive social movements, thus making material assistance to the people less of a 'charity' and more of an 'honourable partnership' to promote a wider movement for people's empowerment and social change.

Finally, the best 'material assistance' that can be given to the people is to help them retain the surplus that they produce themselves rather than bring them resources from outside at outsiders' terms after their own surplus is taken away by intermediaries and other usurpers. In fact, unless the process of surplus

appropriation from the people is arrested, material assistance to the people may actually increase surplus appropriation from them and hence inequality and the imbalance of social power by raising people's productivity in an exploitative framework (as most 'poverty alleviation' works may actually be doing). At the level of social literacy this calls for raising awareness against structural exploitation in society. As a concrete approach toward reducing surplus appropriation, if the market is there to stay, people need to be animated and helped to get on top of it and not stay under. This calls for strategies for the people to develop power over the market – as labour, as producers and as consumers. Collective bargaining for wage labourers, promotion of self-employment to substitute wage labour, and cooperative selling and buying of products, inputs and consumables (up to exporting and importing points) by small producers and people of small material means which make them collective entrepreneurs are such strategies. In this bid people need organizational and management know-how, market information, domestic and/or international, as well as the ability to use modern tools of instant communication toward which action research can help considerably. Ideologically this is 'pragmatic collectivism' given the objective reality of the time – as against the 'romantic collectivism' of the orthodox Left – by way of creative collective action by the people to face the challenge of the market. From this the people will themselves progressively deepen their own ideological perspective toward the question of collectivism in the specific structural and cultural context of their own society.

Conclusion

We are at a juncture of human history where awareness of the continued abuse of the world's resources by private greed, the wildly unequal living standards and domination of the world by the power of wealth and masculinity is growing or is widespread, and popular forces around the world are rising in resistance and are networking together. The ideological urges of enlightened popular forces are clearly for a meaningful form of democracy that gives effective power to the people rather than to local national and international elite groups to guide the course of society and the world. It has been revealed that conventional systems of democracy do not ensure this and that they play into the hands of the wealthy for domination over the people. The search for a meaningful form of democracy is therefore a major task of the hour. As suggested, the specific form of democracy may vary according to people's cultures. But some broad elements are emerging from the ongoing popular protests, which have been outlined in this article.

These elements have an underlying ethical tone of service to broader humanity in the framework of an equitable sharing of the world's resources and social power in harmony with nature. It is suggested that an important task of

grassroots action research today is not merely to seek to promote people's empowerment in local (or broader, but specific geographical) contexts, but also to invite people to contribute their ideas and action toward elaborating form(s) of democracy and communal culture that ensure that humanity, locally as well as globally, will be served. Indeed, action research has a vantage position to contribute to this search by its role as a link between people at the grassroots level and in the wider world of science, thinking and experience.

Needless to say, it is very important that this search is done by walking *with* the people and not ahead of them (as some trends of Marxism had done and got badly beaten up).

The task implies both respecting people's autonomy of thinking and action as well as challenging them, in the spirit of 'uglolana', to reveal their humanity as the ultimate act of self-liberation. Expressions of humanity and assertion can today reach people all over the globe instantaneously, to inform and inspire and join hands with such expressions anywhere else. The role of all action researchers in this global mobilization, by not only doing but also transmitting, and promoting networking amongst people toward a new 'globalization' – the 'web of humanity' – can be invaluable.

Notes

- 1 This article is based on the keynote address at the 5th World Congress on 'Action Learning, Action Research and Process Management' and 8th on 'Participatory Action Research' at the University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia, 10–13 September 2000; and the keynote address at the INTRAC (The International Research and Training Centre) Workshop on 'Evaluation of Social Development with Special Focus on People's Empowerment' at Oxford, England (3–7 April 2000); and at the Evergreen State College, Washington, USA on the International Day (17 April 2000) of its 'Earth Week' celebrations. This update adds reflections on the global protest movement during which I had the opportunity of interacting with students and faculty of the Evergreen State College and also with students of Pitzer College at Claremont, California who participated in the movement. I am particularly grateful to Professors Russ Fox and Jeanne Hahn for providing me with valuable materials on the protests. Responsibility for the reflections in the address is mine only.
- 2 China with its own brand of 'socialism' may be considered as a variation of this generalization – a nation which has risen from the one-time filth of Shanghai to an outstanding and powerful personality. But its social philosophy as well is veering back from the communal toward the individual.
- 3 I was myself educated in this culture of participatory democracy by my interaction with the 'Bhoomi Sena' movement in Maharashtra, India (de Silva et al., 1979).
- 4 It is reported that the resignation of Ravi Kanbur, the lead author of the World Bank's 'Development Report', has been around the question of 'empowerment' – the code word in the World Bank for 'redistribution' – versus 'opportunity' – the

code word for 'growth'. (Alan Beattle's report in the *Financial Express*, Dhaka, 19 June 2000). Kanbur in his original report emphasized non-income dimensions of poverty and recognition of insecurity, voicelessness and powerlessness (available at: <http://www.brettonwoodsproject.org>).

- 5 For two recent studies-cum-discourses on this question see Morse, Rahman and Johnson, 1995 and Rahman, 2000b.

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Anisur Rahman (born 1933) taught economics at Dhaka and Islamabad University and coordinated the Programme on Participation and Organizations of the Rural Poor of the International Labour Office from 1977 until 1990. He is currently associated with the Research Initiatives, Bangladesh (RIB) in Dhaka. Address: 23A Segunbagicha, Dhaka-1000, Bangladesh. [Email: anisurrahman@agni1.net]