

Who am I and Where am I Going?

by Rezvy Ziad

It may appear to the reader this is another attempt by a pseudo intellectual on philosophy, on existence and being, an attempt perhaps at self-seeking or soul searching in a very confused and tumultuous world. I shall do the reader the courtesy (should they take such a view) of not trying to justify my title. However the question begged above, in my humble opinion, needs to be considered, albeit for a moment. The question takes probably greater significance in the current political environment where the slogans of the day are 'globalization', 'new world order', 'one world' and the general theme is 'westernization' of thoughts, belief, ideology and even in what may initially appear as less important things such as cultural values, dress, eating habits; but are no less a threat to our mental and spiritual sovereignty.

In the onslaught of such global indoctrination by media tycoons and other world dominating rulers it is important to adhere to our ancient traditions and values. For that we need to know our own culture, to know who we ourselves are. So what is our cultural identity? Is religion part of that cultural identity? If not can they co-exist peacefully or is there a conflict? Does religion influence our thinking? How do we choose what political ideology or doctrine to follow? These are all questions inextricably linked to the primordial question, who am I? We are all individuals capable of coming to our own conclusion (or are we just like a herd of sheep following the pack, unconcerned about where it is eventually taking us). We have been given eyes and we must look; ears; and we must listen, and a brain; we must think. There is much to be seen, heard and learnt if we are attentive and not entirely absorbed in the buzzing of our own thoughts and cycle of our own personal physical needs. It is from a man's choosing between sleeping and walking and between drifting with the tide or against it upstream that the pattern of our destiny is built. Here we stand, as creatures made for choosing; and we do not know, until the veils are lifted, how much depended upon our choice. It is this choice that will enable us to answer the question who we are and where we are going.

In an age in which men are profoundly alienated from their roots, from the world, from their culture, this imagery threatens further alienation — alienation from the true self. We are no longer our own 'selves' we have taken on the persona, the traditions, the doctrines of foreign cultures with little or no thought, without questioning the value of those western philosophy, without questioning the compatibility to our own being and culture. Often this is blamed on our own inferiority complex of our own beliefs and values. Whether this is the true reason of our

westernization of culture is perhaps the subject of another topic of discussion. However we cannot solely blame westerners for the spread of their 'religion'. It might be more accurate to say that the white man brought out in Asians and Africans qualities which were already present, only waiting to be awakened — hence the speed with which Western vices and ideologies have spread through the rest of the world and also the eagerness with which so many traditional peoples have exchanged their own craftsmanship for Western junk. Once it had come to the surface, no sector of our world was immune. Our own spiritual and ideological vacuum no doubt facilitated the fast spread of this contagious

We have lost our values and will not hesitate to trample a few men and destroy society to achieve our goals, to climb the ladder of social recognition. I am reminded of what a colleague recently wrote, "... it is not important of just setting goals and achieving them, the question to ask is can we justify them....". Modern man is weak, not to say feeble, and he at the same time is subject to pressures — pressures if you like of the new drug of consumerism and commercialisation; and temptations unknown to the people of earlier times.

disease. The price we have paid for this displacement is enormous, as can be witnessed by just observing our society.

Happy is the man who lives in a slovenly and incompetent land where civil servants can be bribed to betray their trust and the bureaucratic administration is incapable of putting any plan to effect. As it is, the pressures — political, social and above all economic are growing in number and in weight; nowhere is there a land which can bask in the sunshine and let the cruel world go by (and take over). No longer can we merely watch the world be-

ing destroyed around us, complaining only about it over tea in drawing rooms and on dining tables. Measures deemed necessary to deal with these pressures come increasingly to resemble those adopted as a means of survival in time of war; the greater the threat, the less tolerance there can be for anything. There are two great battles to be fought; the war to conquer our own selves and the war against society and all its ills. Every man or woman born contains the possibility of being something more than a short-lived creature of this short-lived earth, just as a seed contains in virtuality a great tree. The question again is what ideologies and beliefs shall be watering or tending the man so as to enable it to grow upright? Everyone has the ability to become something great and serve as a useful member of society, what we can be we must be, or fail utterly. We all individually and collectively have a responsibility to, not only our own family, but also to the wider society at large. There is probably hardly a person, who is not unaffected, unconcerned, disgusted at the daily rape, murder, and exploitation of women and children we read in our newspapers. But we cannot merely stop at our feeling of disgust and hatred for the villains, we must act, we must above all do something positive. I am not offering any solutions to the crimes in our society here, but only the obligation and need for all of us who claim to be part of humanity to do something collectively. Awareness of this guilt is at least intellectual recognition of what we are and where we are; it is the beginning of realism and of the knowledge that we are responsible beings.

Should we like animals be solely considered with day to day existence and living unconcerned with humanity at large? If we are to take such attitude it shall be a disgrace for the animal kingdom to compare us to them. There is after all no example or story in the history of the world where animals have raged war against each other so cruelly and fiercely. The world is a theatre, it has often been said, and we are all actors who have our part to play. It is incomprehensible to me that the world is accidental and our role in this ultimate drama just temporary. Like extras in a play we are and then subsequently we are not. For this play to have a happy ending we need to choose our roles with thought and accept our responsibility. Should the current situation prevail and if the heroes do not get there acts together the villains will, whose ultimate aim in conjunction with the devil is to take over the world!

In a world where we appear to be spiritual bankrupt, morally corrupt and unable to distinguish between jus-

tice and truth, perhaps religion can be our only saviour, our only hope in our quest for spiritual fulfilment and harmony in society. We are currently like precious boxes that are empty inside. We have lost our values, our innocence, our concern for humanity, and our love for one another. Enough criticism, especially from so called western thinkers and intellectuals, about religion, has been made. Marx commented "religion is the opium of the masses". In my opinion "capitalism is no lesser a drug for humanity". Consumerism and pursuit of economic success/well being is the new drug of the masses — the heroin, if you like, of contemporary society. The goal to achieve wealth at the cost of anything — we have lost our values and will not hesitate to trample a few men and destroy society to achieve our goals, to climb the ladder of social recognition. I am reminded of what a colleague recently wrote, "... it is not important of just setting goals and achieving them, the question to ask is can we justify them....". Modern man is weak, not to say feeble,

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and he at the same time is subject to pressures — pressures if you like of the new drug of consumerism and commercialisation; and temptations unknown to the people of earlier times. Moreover we live in an environment that is so hostile to religion and to the sacred in its terrestrial forms, that we dismiss and disregard Divine Justice without pausing to think this may be the answer to both our earthly and spiritual problems and needs. We are like drowning men to whom a hand is held out by Divine Religion. If we refuse to recognise this hand for what it is and will not grasp it, trying in the stead to hold onto material and temporary pursuits, then there is no hope for us.

It is time to remember our heritage and to become alert to the ancient wisdom, to look upwards and to look within. The answers are always there, undisturbed by time, in the primordial gift of reminiscence, in all that is above us and, here and now, within our own deepest self-hood. We have only to look in the right direction.

Discrimination Against Women

by Syeda Nasrin Akhter

It may seem odd, perhaps outdated (to some), to be talking of equal opportunities issues. Some may say, these were the concerns of the eighties so why worry about these issues now? Specially when the Chief Executive of the country and the main Opposition leader both are women. But, the truth is — they are only two in number. The idea that women are inferior to men is almost universal. Even in highly developed societies, where women enjoy more freedom and economic benefits, their social status is rarely equal to that of men. The rate of participation of women, for example, in education and employment is very different. While men tend to monopolise executive jobs and are decision makers, women mostly do secretarial work or are engaged in nursing, school teaching or other subordinate and less well paid jobs. The situation of women in third world countries, both in rural and urban areas, is not different. Certainly in Bangladesh female inferiority and male superiority are the accepted social norms. Women constitute about 48 per cent of the total population of Bangladesh. Their economic, political and cultural conditions present a gloomy picture. Their lives are dominated by men to a great extent (excluding a very fortunate few). Everywhere in the streets, markets, offices, factories and at social and political gatherings (specially in rural areas) it is men who are mainly seen. Women largely stay inside their homes. Irrespective of their religious beliefs women are subject to patriarchal control. Their invisibility arises from a number of quarters; language, lack of data, lack of power and concepts of 'femininity' which say that women ought to be passive, docile and dependent. The same view sees a woman's natural place as being in the home (that is out of public life) where she has a specific set of tasks which are thought to be universal because they are based on biological differences. One of the most insidious attacks in language. Over the past few years a number of expressions have become politically incorrect. The use of the word 'chairman' which assumes that the post holder should be a man or 'madam chairman' suggesting that a woman will operate in an amateurish fashion. There are many everyday examples: it is more common for women to have 'Ms' offered as a title paralleling them with men where title does not reveal their marital status. The new man may be rebelling against ingrained sexism but has there really been an attitude change? Women may no longer hear dehumanising and insulting expressions such as 'bird', 'chick' but does this mean they are on the way out? Perhaps there is progress but consider the still widespread use of 'man' as a so-called generic term. Research has shown that the word 'man' is generally understood to be gender specific, in other words the word conjures up a man not humanity. The pronoun 'he' operates in the same way, being used to convey humankind but setting in the mind a male figure.

Sexist language is any item of language which through its structure of use, constitutes a male as norm view of society to be trivialising, insulting or rendering women invisible. The male as norm view is further supported by lack of data about women. Research often fails to pick up the gender element suggesting that the experience of women is the same as that of men. Even where research has identified that experience of women is the same as that of men. Even where research has identified that particular problems of women there is not a guaranteed response to the issue. Regarding employment of women the available literature states that in Bangladesh, men as fathers, husbands or employers have very critical attitudes towards women's employment. As fathers men discourage employment because it may be an obstacle to a girl's marriage. As husbands, men do not want their wives to work outside the home mainly because they fear that their may lead to their inability to control them. Moreover, employment enables women to have a greater pur-

chasing power which enables them to take more decisions independently. There are evidences that these qualities are discouraged by Bangladeshi males. Male employers are more critical and sceptical of the employment of women. Pre-conceived notions about women being 'unreliable', 'inefficient' and 'unfit for responsible positions or hard work' make women's entry to most categories of employment difficult.

A survey conducted recently among a cross-section of 500 men in Dhaka city, found that they considered household work and domestic employment (sewing, private tuition, toy making) to be the most suitable for women. Next, in order of preference, was teaching, followed by medicine. The respondents felt that in these occupations women would be able to cater for female clients. They would avoid conversing with men and therefore preserve the chastity of woman. If this is the attitude of men living in urban areas, what would be the attitude of rural men, who are supposed to hold more

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conservative ideas regarding the employment of women? As with the operation of all discriminations, sexism also seeks to oppress not only through stereotyping and exclusion but also through violence which takes many forms. The obvious example is the woman who suffers at the hands of a violent partner. In the working places violence takes many forms including sexual harassment in the form of dirty jokes, personal remarks, pornographic pictures is used by men of power to threaten, humiliate and patronise women causing loss of mental and physical well-being. Thanks to the Women's Movement the attitudes (partly) are different, the language is less patronising, women are tolerated if not welcomed in places previously forbidden to them. Political parties, banks, industry now take women more seriously and so do women themselves. They have become more assertive and confident. Yet it is still true that rich men have the best of all worlds and poor women the worst. There are few women at the top in industry or any of the professions and remarkably few (who are elected) in the parliament.

Much has been achieved in the field of women's struggle for equality — yet the visibility of women has not increased greatly and decision makers with power over men and women are likely to be men. It seems to me we have a long long way to go.

Generally, meetings should be scheduled as far in advance as possible. The meetings associated with the day-to-day operation of a business often must be called on short notice, but the conventions and large conferences are almost always scheduled a year or more in advance.

Some meetings must be scheduled for a particular time; however, the time of most meetings depends on the availability of those expected to a large part of many executives' work day is spent in meetings. For many of the meetings, the executives assemble in an office or conference room; however, advanced technology in the communications area makes meetings possible for those who may be in different geographical locations.

The secretary's responsibilities concerning meetings of company personnel may include notifying the executives of the time and purpose of the meeting, arranging for conference calls, scheduling equipment needed, and taking notes of the meeting.

Executives are often involved in community and professional organisations and may be responsible for arranging meetings for a group. Secretaries to these executives are often asked to assist with maintaining the mailing lists, sending notices of meetings, reserving rooms and equipment, typing and duplicating programmes, and preparing minutes.

Profitable meetings, like accidents, don't happen; they are caused. Remember two things about meetings: (1) meetings call for planning; and (2) there is an accepted sequence or order of business at meetings.

- I. Planning (a few Do's and Don'ts)
 - A. Do
 1. Have clearly in mind the objective (purpose) of the meeting.
 2. See to the physical arrangement ahead of time (clean, cool and attractive room, positioning of chairs, etc.).
 3. Check correspondence to be read, speakers to be introduced, important motions to be moved.
 4. Do be enthusiastic. Nothing succeeds without enthusiasm.
 - B. Don't
 1. Fail to start on time.
2. Let the members sit scattered about the hall; request them to take their seats at the front.
3. Get bogged down in unimportant items.
4. Go beyond the time fixed.

II. Order of Business (Agenda)

- A. Call to order: ("The meeting will come to order").
- B. Readings of minutes (concise and crisp).
- C. Communications (only important letters read and filed).
- D. Treasurer's Report (often printed and distributed).
- E. Presentation of Reports (arranged ahead of time).
- F. Unfinished business (old before the new).
- G. New business (keep the meeting moving).
- H. Adjournment (time, place of next meeting).

EFFECTIVE MEETINGS QUESTIONNAIRE

Take a look at the statements given below. Think of what is generally true of your group's meetings. If the statement expresses what generally or usually happens at your meetings, check 'Yes'. If generally speaking it is not true of your meetings, check 'No'. If you are uncertain, check the 'Question mark'.

1. A visitor would be favourably impressed by the problem-solving attitudes and procedure of the group.
2. Argumentation is at the personal level and not on merits.
3. People have a sense of accomplishment after meetings.
4. The agenda contains items that are not appropriate matter for group discussion.
5. Either before the meeting or at its beginning, any group member can easily get items into the agenda.
6. People come to the meetings not knowing what is to be presented or discussed.
7. The group discusses and evaluates how decisions from previous meetings worked out.
8. There are many problems about which people are concerned that never get on the agenda.
9. When conflict arises, the group does not avoid it, but



really stays with the conflict and works it through. 10. Decisions are often left vague — as to what they are, and who will carry them out. 11. The meetings begin and end on time.