

The real tragedy today is the absence of a leadership that can take humanity out of its present unenviable state. Out of six billion men, women and children who now live on planet Earth, three billion are struggling to survive on less than two dollars a day; 1.2 billion of these subsist on less than a dollar a day. Since the 1950s, nearly two million hectares of land, which comprise 23 percent of all cropland, pasture, forest and woodland, have been degraded. Every decade, another five percent of tropical forests are being destroyed. More than a third of terrestrial biodiversity is squeezed into habitat fragments covering just 1.4 percent of the earth's surface and could vanish if these fragments are lost. The addition of two billion people to the world's population over the last 30 years and urban migration have produced crowded cities which are unable to sustain their populace because of poor infrastructure and limited resources; even the air is unhealthy in these mega-cities. Add to this a whole range of other global catastrophes, such as the global spread of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, water-borne diseases and malnutrition, and we have a glimpse of the great imbalance which characterizes our world.

In addition to these facts, there are dilemmas which cannot be quantified; numbers do not tell us anything about the spiritual travail of the human race at this point in history, nor do they narrate the tale of devastation caused by erosion of values. But there are tell-tale signs of a widespread discontent that runs through all societies, creating a state of anxiety peculiar to our times. In addition, there are regions of the world where societies have been fractured to such an extent that genocidal conflicts have led to immense human suffering. At another level, the fact that the twenty-first century has already witnessed two wars in which lethal weapons, produced by modern technology, have been used without restraint to cause devastation which differs from all previous war-time disorders and destructions by several orders of magnitude, has something to say about the future of the human race.

But these are mere words, incapable of communicating the suffering of the child born with deformities because of radiation from weapons coated

with depleted uranium—radiation that is silently at work at this very moment, crippling thousands of newly born and yet to be born children.

At the foundational level, the real tragedy of the human race today is, however, neither its increasing numbers nor its infatuation with ever-new technologies which are devastating the resources which should be available to our future generation to sustain life in this fine-tuned universe. Our real dilemma today is a two-fold tragedy that deserves “tears as sovereign as the blood of hearts”, as the divinely inspired Bard would have it. But there are no tears today, for even an awareness of the tragedy has been eclipsed from human sight.

One facet of this tragedy is the absence of visionary leadership capable of leading humanity out of its quagmire. This crisis of leadership is present in all civilizations and in all domains of human endeavor—from sciences to philosophy and from literature to arts. In the political sphere, the human race has fallen into the hands of those whose vision is as limited as their puny minds; yet they have control over such powerful weapons that can eliminate the entire human race in a few hours. There is hardly a philosopher, poet or statesman left among us who is universally respected as the spokesperson for humanity and whose heart is illuminated with transcendent wisdom.

The second aspect of our tragedy is the rapid eclipsing of the ancient sources of guidance that have informed, guided and illuminated the lives of countless men and women on paths of self-awareness rooted in perennial wisdom. This eclipsing, which is once again a universal phenomenon, has produced a massive breakdown of values through relativism. In the absence of universally recognized Truth, thousands of “truths” have emerged. These call humanity to their service and leave us with fractured societies, decaying from within.

This universal tragedy may well be the last real trial of our race. And if this were true, then, in this dwindling twilight, on the eve of our existence on this planet, those who can still see Truth need to proclaim it with ever-more force, because their acquiescence only strengthens falsehood.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Muzaffar', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.