

The Crumbling Social Structure

The Indian social structure, or for that matter the Assamese social structure as we know today, is a product of thousands of years. Of late, there has been talking of this unique identity of ours being lost. It seems our social structure is falling apart.

The most important component of the social structure is the *culture*. Culture is a result of the interaction humans have with his/her environment. Since environment is not static, culture cannot be – it is a very simple fact. With globalization gaining ground, it is but imperative that we move towards a *uni-culture* world. (It is a false notion that the threat of being swamped by an alien culture is true only in case of the east, it is a universal phenomenon.) Does this imply that we forego our rich cultural heritage and discard our traditional knowledge and wisdom? Of course, not. We must accept the ground realities and find a way out of adapting to a uni-culture world and at the same time maintain the rich diversity of cultures. This is possible by having, what I feel a *multi-layered* uni-culture. This, we are already practicing. What I mean will be amply clear, if I give an example. We communicate with our mother tongue (own culture) at home and once we go to the office, we communicate in English for whatever reasons (alien culture). This arrangement can be extended to all facets of our life. If necessary, we can have many layers. This arrangement is exemplified by the Japanese, who has adapted to the western way of life in many aspects of their living, including dressing without giving up their customs and their way of life which they still practice in totality. I believe it is a false impression that wearing western dresses by girls or women promotes vulgarity and indecency, not to talk of distorting our culture and erosion of values. It remains a fact that a girl/woman wearing a sari or a *salwaar kameez* may be indecent while a girl/woman wearing a jeans/skirt may be *very* decent. The war as such should be between vulgarity and decency and not between western and eastern (?) dresses. It's a *classic* case of wrong priorities, and the sooner we understand this, the better.

The biggest strength of the Indian Social System has been its deep and unfailing faith in values. And somewhere down the line, we forewent this faith. And, the results are for everybody to see. Today, it is a common notion that living by values is a liability, you end up being nowhere. No wonder, parents spend a fortune in educating their wards, giving them the best of facilities but fail to instill in them the right values. I remember being rebuked by my father when I asked for a bicycle. It was not that he could not afford me one. It became a challenge for me to acquire one on my own. I took tuitions and saved enough money to buy a cycle. He helped me gain confidence and stand on my own. When I applied for my driving licence, everybody suggested that I pay some extra money and get it issued very quickly. I refused; and had to endure months of waiting and innumerable visits to the DTO's office before my licence was finally issued. People said that I wasted my time. I believe I invested my time in my conscience and my values. I am driving home the point that the present generation is blindly aping others. We are afraid of being different from the crowd. We would better flow with the tide even if it leads us to disaster than try and swim against it and chart a new course of self discovery and self attainment.

Our problems stem from the fact that in the name of more and more freedom, we have forgotten that freedom does not give us the licence to become irresponsible. We claim freedom of speech/expression, freedom to smoke, freedom to dress the way we like and what not? But in doing so, we forget that we should not be infringing on others senses and sensibilities. We talk about our rights, day in and day out, what about our duties? And, these are the reasons why the social structure is crumbling like nine pins.

Mind you, I am no saint. But yes, I know, I have never done anything intentionally to infringe on other's rights, to promote corruption, to harm others, because my conscience won't allow that. I may have lost opportunities, time and money because I have not compromised with my values but I have slept well. I know, I can make a difference and that gives me the courage to fight for what I know is the right thing. Truth after all, said *Plato* is eternal. Do I belong to another era? No, I am only 28!