

The Times of India Online

Printed from timesofindia.indiatimes.com &gt;Editorial

**THE SPEAKING TREE****Increasing Our Gross National Character****Phone Card**

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[ THURSDAY, JULY 01, 2004 12:00:00 AM ]

Several years ago, we met Kapil Jawa, an MBA student. He shared with us a fascinating subject he had researched for his thesis: a values-based approach to measuring economic development. Just as economic growth is necessary for human development, human development is critical to economic growth. This two-way link must be at the heart of any enlightened policy action.

One of the most startling things he demonstrated was that the lack of wealth was not the barrier to over-coming our world's hunger, poverty and social problems. Citing data from the UN World and Human Development Reports 1998, he showed that in 1997, Europeans and Americans together spent more on cosmetics, perfumes and pet foods than it would have taken to provide reproductive health, basic health and nutrition for all people on the planet. And military spending in that same period was twenty times that. So the resources are not lacking in this world, but the will, the understanding and the compassion.

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Kapil also pointed out the philosophy found in Kautilya's Arthashastra inspired the revival of many kingdoms in India for years after his reign. The healthiest state of affairs was one in which values higher than worldly possessions received honour and approval; maximum production was not the supreme objective of the economic organisation; commerce or wealth-making was not an end in itself; and merchants and manufacturers carried out their activities in a trust for the society they lived in.

Kapil's conclusions were that the Gross National Product (GNP) and per capita income are not holistic indicators to compare the progress and development of nations. A developmental philosophy should be framed in terms of achieving the overall welfare of society and not just economic growth. Economic development should result in enabling people to achieve the final spiritual goal of human life.

The five universal values — truth, righteousness, peace, love and non-violence — besides economic indicators, should be taken into account in the computation of national development. We concluded from Kapil's inspiring thesis that the real wealth of a nation is the character of its people.

Swami Vivekananda said: The rise of nations comes with an increase of men of character and of strong ethical and moral fibre.

Therefore, every country in the world that wishes to increase its real wealth must necessarily focus on increasing its Gross National Character (GNC), along with its GNP. The purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is too often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth.

While initiatives are there at the macro level, more work needs to be done at the micro level. Business leaders who can make a dramatic difference to overall global welfare should take the lead in character-building, both among colleagues and at the institutional level. How? We've found that character springs most deeply and most directly from our spiritual nature. The real call therefore is for transformational leaders who base their leadership on their spiritual roots and values.

The word economics comes from the Greek word oikonomos, meaning "household management". When we begin to manage our companies and our economies with the same character and interest as we would our households, it becomes easy to build the Gross National Character.

*(The authors write for the column, 'Spirituality at Work' a <http://spirituality.indiatimes.com>)*

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