



Untested Simplicity of the Villages, by Ram Dass

Is the vision of simple living provided by this village in the East the answer? Is this an example of a primitive simplicity of the past or of an enlightened simplicity of the future?

Gradually I have to come to sense that this is not the kind of simplicity that the future holds. For despite its ancient character, the simplicity of the village is still in its "infancy".

Occasionally people show me their new babies and ask me if that peaceful innocence is not just like that of the Buddha. Probably not, I tell them, for within that baby reside all the latent seeds of worldly desire, just waiting to sprout as the opportunity arises. On the other hand, the expression on the face of the Buddha, who had seen through the impermanence and suffering associated with such desires, reflects the invulnerability of true freedom.

So it is with the village. Its ecological and peaceful way of living is unconsciously won and thus is vulnerable to the winds of change that fan the latent desires of its people. Even now there is a familiar but jarring note in this sylvan village scene. The sound of static and that impersonal professional voice of another civilization -- the radio announcer -- cut through the harmony of sounds as a young man of the village holding a portable radio to his ear comes around a bend. On his arm there is a silver wrist watch, which sparkles in the sun. He looks at me proudly as he passes. And a wave of understanding passes through me. Just behind that radio and wristwatch comes an army of desires that for centuries have gone untested and untasted. As material growth and technological change activate these yearnings, they will transform the heart, minds, work and daily life of this village within a generation or two.

Gradually I see that the simplicity of the village has not been consciously chosen as much as it has been unconsciously derived as the product of centuries of unchanging custom and tradition. The [villages] have yet to fully encounter the impact of technological change and material growth. When the [villages] have encountered the latent desires within its people, and the cravings for material goods and social position begin to wear away at the fabric of traditional culture, then it can begin to choose its simplicity consciously. Then the simplicity of the [villages] will be consciously won -- voluntarily chosen.

--Ram Dass, in Voluntary Simplicity [<http://ow.ly/T8Vq>]

