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They look westwards for inspiration, dazzled by the apparent wealth and progress of the so-called first world, little realizing that these are insubstantial and transient. The industrial, capital-intensive, city-centric economy of the west has become a barrier to progress. They cannot even find people willing to go back to their roots and work in rural areas, which indeed are the treasury of natural wealth.

Our youth must not get taken in by the superficial glitz and glamour of the west. It must not make the error of following a flawed model of development. It is in the villages of India that its moral, social and economic strength lies. It is here, in the rural heartland, that the youth must focus their energies. My experiences of the last 28 years have convinced me that humanitarian values are woven into the warp and weft of rural India. Villages remain relatively immune from the cancer of greed. Suffering and sorrow are shared. It is, therefore, easier to nurture patriotic sentiments among them.

Dependent as they are on natural resources for their very survival, rural folk live in absolute harmony with their environment. If they do not do so, the rural economy suffers to the detriment of all, whether urban or rural. For it is in the rural hinterland that natural resources are found and essential commodities produced. Cities cannot produce agricultural goods. To fulfill their appetite, they have to depend on villages. City-dwellers, being consumers and not producers, cannot comprehend the importance of living in harmony with mother nature.

Man is by nature a builder, using his creative skills to further his creature comforts. He cooks his food and manufactures garments, builds houses and efficient means of transportation. No matter how complex his creations, however, the raw materials come from the forest, or the womb of mother earth; that is, from the rural hinterland. Agriculture and animal husbandry meet Man's most basic needs. These come from the villages. It stands to reason, then, that if rural areas are not developed and the rural economy is neglected, the nation cannot progress. Strangely, this fundamental truth appears to have escaped the attention of our planners.