

The Millennium Madness

Next millennium is fast approaching. The whole world is preparing to welcome the new millennium. But is the importance given to this event justified?

■ G.P. Vinayababu



We are nearing the turn of yet another millennium, marking the completion of a thousand years on a universally accepted calendar. So what's so great about it? What makes year 2000 so magical that it has created a mass hysteria amongst the world's populace? Though most people claim that they are unconcerned about the turn of the millennium, the fact remains that it has generated considerable interest among all of us.

It is necessary at this point of time to understand what year 2000 means to us. Is it the completion of 2000 years of humanity? Is it the completion of 2 millennia of human civilization. Or is it just the completion of 2K years on the western calendar? The last of the three is true in this case. Mr. Tony opines thus on the internet "The year 2000 is nothing more than a number on the western calendar. And the majority of the world does not use the western calendar. It is sheer arrogance for the western world to think that it's calendar is the be-all and end-all for the whole world".

This opinion makes more sense since 2000 years is actually less than a speck in the history of our planet. The life on Earth has been a constant source of curiosity for man from times immemorial and it is notable here that there hasn't been a universally accepted theory so far on the origins of Earth, though there are several theories put forth by scientists and traditionalists alike. The Earth itself is estimated to have been formed at least 4500 million years ago according to radioactive dating techniques and the signs of life on this planet dates back to a few million years after that. The great Dinosaurs, which dominated the Earth, is believed to have

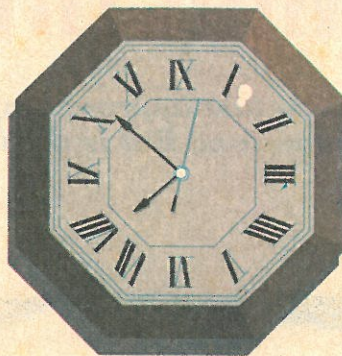
lived around a 100 million years ago from now. And man is believed to have been evolved from lower species only after the passage of several millions of years after that. So, why is the completion of 2000 years given so much of importance?

The Christian community thinks that year 2000 would bring about the end of the world and would mark the reemergence of Jesus Christ, ushering in a new era of life.

Christian belief apart, Y2K is seen as a significant milestone in the history of mankind. We spoke to many people across a wide cross section of the society on this issue. Ms. Ranjini Nagendra, a student from Bangalore says, "A millennium is a milestone where you look back on what has happened and look forward to something better. I would give much importance to the turn of this millennium because I will not be around to witness the next". The same view is expressed by Dr. Chittaranjan Andrade, one of the very well known psychiatrists in the country. He says "Yes, I give importance to the turn of the millennium-if only to inspire those who need something like this as a motivation!". Some like Ms. Jose, a lecturer of Physics in St. Joseph's college are more realistic in their opinion on the turn of the millennium, "First I felt that it is stupidity to give importance to the turn of the millennium. But then the very thought made me aware of the responsibilities each one of us have got to fulfill". "If you can't beat em' join em" seems to be the slogan of Chris Avinash, a salesman from Bangalore, who believes that there is a kind of mass euphoria gripping the world on this issue. The opinions expressed by people on this issue ranged from enraged outburst to absolute optimism. Says Dr. K. Vijayananda, an Assistant Manager in a reputed software firm in Bangalore, "Forget the new millennium or the new year, to me, every coming day is different. Different in terms of how I see and perceive things before me". Some were really down to earth in their approach. "Simply that I should get used to writing '20' prefix instead of '19' in the next century" says a journalism student from Bangalore.

Reason to believe

The Mystery of the Millenium



As we get closer to the end of this century and the beginning of the next, the confusion surrounding when one stops and the other starts will grow more and more annoying. There have been seemingly endless references to the year 2000 as being the first year of the Twenty-First Century. It is NOT! It is the last year of the Twentieth Century.

Centuries have 100 years in them, not 99. To complete 20 centuries, one must have marked off 20 x 100 years, i.e. 2000 years. Thus a century ALWAYS ends in a year with two zeros at the end. The 20th century began at the stroke of midnight, January 1, 1901, it will end 100 years later when, at the stroke of midnight, January 1, 2001, the 21st century will begin.

Part of the confusion lies in the different ways that our culture counts years. We count our ages from the end of years.

A new born child is not said to be 1 year old for example. But calendar years, in most cultures, including ours, count years from the beginning, not the end. This is why there was no year 0 for instance and why we speak of beginning a new year.

It is important to remember that our calendar is not a folk system that people just happen to use. It is the product of generations of scholars. It is a regular system, not just a collection of cultural habits. So called 'logical' arguments tend to ignore this. Any good history of the Gregorian Calendar, any decent encyclopedia, even a good almanac will contain some synopsis of how it works.

As we get closer to the wrong day, the drumbeat of proclamations will get louder. Please do your part to inform the chronologically challenged. □

It is a common tendency that we human beings always look forward to better things in life in future. 'Hope' is what makes us live through the days of despair. It is precisely for this reason that every new year is welcomed with great vigour and enthusiasm. The expectations are always high at the dawn of the new year while gloom prevails at the end of it. People would want to just get rid of the last few months of the year in order to get into a new one. This perception of gloom and uncertainty probably prompted one of the leading regional language magazines in South India to come up with a story on the 'end of the world' in the year 2000. This article created

such a furore in the market that the magazines were sold at 10-20 times the actual coverprice. Today's life is a struggle of sorts. People who want to simply escape from this struggle and reality find it extremely convenient to believe that the world will come to an end by the year 2000. The prophecies of various religious sects provide further fillip to people's beliefs. And the scientific evidence of the growing destruction of our environment due to man-made disasters makes it even more credible.

Eruption of volcanic mountains, floods, earthquakes, fog cover over the Asian countries, dent in the ozone layer etc., etc.,



Explosion of Mount St. Helens in Washington

are cited as indications of the impending disaster by the doomsday prophets. All these things could be dismissed as attempts by religious leaders to drive the unsuspecting citizens into submission. It can be viewed as desperate attempts by the unsatisfied lot of people to get rid of their miserable lives on Earth.

But are all the prophecies just plain lies? We shouldn't forget that man himself is capable of bringing about his extinction within no time. He has been developing weapons of mass destruction for power and supremacy all along the history of mankind. Major weapons invented by man have been used against himself to kill human race in mass numbers. From Napoleon's gun powder to Hitler's aerial destructors, men have been annihilated by men in large numbers. And now, we have weapons of ultimate destruction - nuclear bombs, artificial viruses, chemical and biological weapons and so on, which can bring about our doom without God's interference. So, there is no reason for us to believe that total destruction is only the imagination of escapist.

Looking back and looking ahead

A majority of people we met felt that the turn of a new year or a new millennium provides an excellent opportunity for retrospect and prospect.

Looking back at the events that have unfolded in the present millennium, one would observe that there has been a dramatic. Though it has always been man's

endeavour to make his life more comfortable and happy, it is only towards the end of this millennium i.e., during the last two centuries, (including the present one), that there has been a total transformation. We observe that the development has been more dramatic in the last 100 years than all the other 900 years put together. And similarly the development has been mind boggling in

the last few decades which overshoots the developmental rates in all the previous millenia, centuries and decades put together, thanks to the rapid growth of technology.

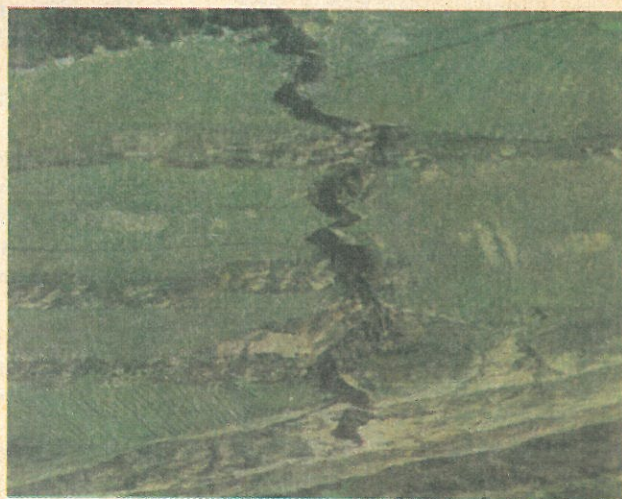
If the turn of the millennium is used to sow the seeds of fear and confusion by some people, it is being viewed with optimism by others, mostly men of science.

Most of the people we spoke to during our survey felt that technology would bring lasting peace and prosperity to the world in the next millennium. Says Dr. Chittaranjan Andrade "Computers will become an essential part of our everyday lives and our every day life will become what today's science fiction is". But it was Dr. Bhaskar Rao, the Executive Director of Society for Technology, Environment and Management (STEM) who exuded total

confidence in the future of the world in general and India in particular. (See an exclusive interview). He foresees a very bright future in the next millennium for India. He dismisses all talk of dooms day as rubbish. "I don't think it will happen. We are monitoring the environment very well. If there is a possibility of catastrophe, man will definitely invent something to meet such

an eventuality" he says. He goes on to give statistical evidence to explain that the life will be much better in future as far as India is concerned.

He says "Population of India will touch one billion mark within a couple of years i.e. by the turn of the century- 2001. People living in the urban areas - with better habitats, comforts and quality of life - will increase in the next century. The population will reach 1020 millions by the year 2015 and will remain stable after that. The overall growth rate of population in the century is declining and will further decline in future. It was 2.1 per cent in eighties and has declined to 1.8 per cent in 90s and will be 1.5 per cent in the first decade of the next century. The disparity in household size between urban and rural will fully disappear by 2010. The size of household (person per family) is declining - 6.06 in 1951 to 5.34 in 1991. It will be 4.78 in 2011 both in urban and rural areas. The percentage of urban households that are having access to safe drinking water has increased from 74 per cent in 1981 to 82 per cent in 1991 and will improve further in the next century. The electricity users who constituted 62 per cent in 1984 have increased to 76% in 1991 and will near cent percent in 2001. The percentage of effective housing deficit to stock which is about 4.19 percent is likely to decline to 1.2 per cent by 2011. The overall life in general will improve in the next century". Isn't that happy news for us. □



San Andreas in California

The people say....

There is a lot of talk in the town about the 21st century. Countries all over the world are preparing for the mega event. Places near the international date line are preparing to meet the wave of tourists who want to be the first to welcome the new millennium. England is in the process of building a millennium wheel which will be one of the biggest tourist attractions of London in the next millennium. Paris proposes to have mega celebrations where the Eiffel Tower 'lays an egg'. The Egg would contain monitors which show happenings at the dawn of the millennium all over the world. Software professionals on the other hand are working feverishly to solve the millennium bug.

Apart from the general feeling of euphoria, there is also a more expedient feeling of disaster and doom - the end of the Earth.

This mania with millennium in mind sparked off a curiosity amongst us. We at Technoworld decided to find out what people actually thought of all these happenings. So we asked people from a cross section of society about their views.

A majority are unconcerned with the happenings. Most people are not giving much thought to this at least on paper.

There is a general opinion among people that the day heralding the new millennium is just another day in the daily grind. Some people expecting a new wave of technology, are updating their lifestyles. A significant percentage of people however feel that there is no necessity to prepare for the new millennium - they expect to take it as it comes.

In the 21st century, people expect good life prosperity and a life of oneness with nature. A feeling of eternal peace and more humane humanity is expected.

Summarily, many feel that the importance given to the millennium - the millennium mania - is unjustified. Man

I feel....

1. How are you preparing to meet the next millennium?

It'll meet us even if we don't want.

Ashwin S., Student.

There is no use in preparing a crash programme to face the next millennium.

Dr. B.R. Hegde, Director of Research, UAS, GKVK Campus.

2. Do you believe in 'Doom's Day'? Why?

No. Nature always confirms to smooth functions.

Dr. K. Vijayananda, Manager.

No, but I do believe that a nuclear holocaust may spell the end of civilisation.

Dr. Chittaranjan Andrade, Psychiatrist.

Any catastrophe for that matter can affect a part of some species of life, not all.

Ananth, Faculty, ISCT

No, it is entirely in the hands of each individual to make his or her day.

Usha Shekar, Lecturer, JNC

Live for the moment. Don't think about tomorrow.

Vishnu Tejaswi, Graphic Designer.

No, because I have no means to ascertain it scientifically.

Dr. Prasanna Kumar, Eye-specialist.

3. What are your expectations for the 21st century?

I expect things to go even worse! May be a world war III by then.

Ashwin S., Student.

A cleaner world, harmony, growth and peace.

Joselin Jose, Lecturer.

4. How different is a millennium from a new year for you?

A millennium is a one time chance. I think, I will be fully blown out that day.

Ramachandran B., Development engineer.

Simply that I should get used to writing a '20' prefix instead of '19'!

Divakar, Student.

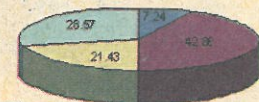
5. Do u feel it is proper for us to give so much importance to the turn of this millennium?

Yes. If only to inspire those who need something like this as a motivation.

Dr. Chittaranjan Andrade, Psychiatrist.

should try to better his life always. Whether it's the turn of a century or a year, a life of integrity, honesty and faith in the Holy

HOW ARE YOU PREPARING TO MEET THE NEXT MILLENNIUM?



- 1 HOPE FOR THE BEST
- 2 NOT BOTHERED AS IT COMES
- 3 PREPARED

1

DO YOU BELIEVE IN 'DOOM'S DAY'?



- 1 NO
- 2 YES
- 3 DON'T KNOW

2

WHAT ARE YOUR EXPECTATIONS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY?



- 1 NO EXPECTATIONS
- 2 HOPE FOR A GOOD LIFE
- 3 HUMANE HUMANITY

3

HOW DIFFERENT IS A NEW MILLENNIUM FROM A NEW YEAR FOR YOU?



- 1 NO DIFFERENCE
- 2 DIFFERENCE
- 3 DEPENDS ON THE INDIVIDUAL

4

DO YOU FEEL IT IS PROPER FOR US TO GIVE SO MUCH IMPORTANCE TO THE TURN OF THIS MILLENNIUM?



- 1 YES
- 2 NO
- 3 PARTLY

5

spirit should be the goal of life. This is the feeling that was felt during the course of this exercise.

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Population will stabilise by 2015

Prof. Bhaskar Rao



Excerpts of an exclusive interview with Prof. Bhaskar Rao, Executive Director, STEM.

What are your projections for the future?

Quality of life would be much better - in terms of housing, infrastructure, better water supply, better roads, good drainage system, public sanitation, etc. We always think that there is a lot of disparity between the upper and lower income groups. This also is likely to reduce by 2010. With this, the migration from smaller settlements to larger settlements will decline. Smaller settlements will also become more habitable. Most of the comforts and luxuries one would expect in a urban setup might be available in rural areas itself. There is surplus money in rural areas. All this is ploughed into the cities by the richmen in villages as of now. This also may get reversed. More investments is likely to come in the smaller and medium towns. If there are more investments, more jobs will be created in those towns.

Will the skewed and imbalanced development in cities change?

It is very difficult unless the Government decides to correct its policies. Development has always been skewed and not overall. It took place only in big

cities. But megacities may not grow in the same way as in the past. It is already showing a decline. Cities with more than 1 million population have lot of economic benefits. Governments have been pampering these cities, which has led to centralisation of population. All the metropolitan cities enjoy subsidies. Most subsidised city in India is Delhi. People in smaller and medium towns may not allow this to happen in future. That has already begun in some places where people are asking for separate states. This awareness will force Government to look into other towns. Decentralised expenditure will lead to decentralised developments. There may be a time lag for this to come into effect. But it will happen very soon.

What changes do you foresee in the human population patterns in the next millennium?

Population increase will not be that fast in future. Today's population growth rate is 1.8% per year. It has come down from 2.4% in 1951 to 1.8% now. This may further go down to 1.5% very soon. By 2015, the population of India may get stabilised at 1020 millions. More and more people are realising now that they cannot have a better quality of life with more

children. They are voluntarily coming forward to participate in family planning in a big way. And our efforts in family planning haven't failed. They are proving to be a success. People may criticise that this should have been achieved long back. There may be a delay, but we are in the correct direction. One should observe that the number of deaths due to old age have also decreased.

What about transportation?

What worries me most is that people are investing money in roads. This is purely a western concept. Whereas in countries like India and other Asian countries where population is more and available space is less, roads are not suitable. Railway network should have been improved in India for efficient and economical transportation. Take for example : Bangalore and Mysore. There are a number of buses plying every day between these two cities. But you won't get a ticket in a train even ten days in advance. This is the same case throughout India. Suppose one more track is added in the same route, more number of trains can run and the transportation will be more easier, cheaper and faster. Instead of this, we are planning for the roads.

Population, Households and Household Size : 1951 to 2011

Year	Population (in Millions)		
	Urban	Rural	Total
1951 +	62.40	298.50	360.90
1961+	79.10	360.10	439.20
1971+	108.90	438.30	547.20
1981+	159.70	525.50	685.20
1991+	217.61	628.70	846.31
Projection			
2001	308.98	703.75	1012.73
2006	361.51	727.04	1088.55
2011	416.81	741.00	1157.81

Unfortunately, railway service is monopolised by Government and there is no opportunity for private investment in it. Roads have to be improved, no doubt. But railways should be given more importance.

Is ELRTS a solution to the traffic problems in our cities?

ELRTS is essentially a two tier road where one tier is exposed to road transport and the other to rail. But with ELRTS you will be losing one or two lanes on the road. Instead of that, though it may prove costlier, it is better to go in for underground systems. The only country which doesn't use underground railway is America. Unfortunately that has become the model for many countries.

What will be the market economy of India in the next century?

In countries like India and China where population is very high, the markets are very large and the resources are also very high, any kind of economic or social pressures can be withstood unlike other countries like Japan, Singapore or Sweden. That's why we are able to survive so far. I think our future is brighter.

All others will try to exploit these conditions. That is also our strength to demand and dictate terms to others.

Do you think attacks on our environment will be a major concern in the next century in India?

Till we reach a certain level of development, we should not be concerned about environmental issues. For us, in India, to reach a level of decent habitation, it is essential to go in for atomic power plants. And dams are necessary for the progress of our agricultural sector. But our so called environmentalists are opposing both. It is unfortunate that our environmentalists are becoming copy cats of western environmentalists.

Is there a threat to human kind in the next century?

I don't think it will happen. We are monitoring the environment very well.

Dooms day believers & nonbelievers

Those who swear by it

There are a group of people who are looking forward to the predicted events with anticipation. They fall into vague groups as follows.

1. The dispossessed citizens who's life situation could do with a change - any sort of change - perhaps even death. They wish to punish the people who have suppressed them, and also those who have more to lose than they themselves have.
2. Religious idealists who by arrogance believe that they will be saved from destruction by a super being, "and all the rest can go to Hell, for they deserve it".
3. New age converts who feel powerless, and look to some advanced material race to come from the clouds to save them.
4. People constantly need a sense of belonging, a sense of dignity and a future. They will cling to anything that seems to satisfy this need, no matter whether the outcome may mean their demise.
5. Some people don't like the world they see around them, and would be glad to see major changes, even if they have to suffer in the process.
6. There are others who feel that they have not done too well in this life, and

realize that all their past failures will be meaningless, if the entire base of their life changes.

Those that won't even consider it

1. Wealthy people who are steeped in materialism and find pleasure in empty headedness and exploitation.
2. Skeptics - that psychological group who fear any deviation from 'normal common sense'. They protest, perhaps too much, about anything new, old or different.
3. Political and religious 'salesmen' who stand to lose control of their flock, and hence receive less privilege or power, as it is discovered that they have no solutions or answers to anything.
4. Some people are too busy earning a living to think straight. They would rather be subservient and make a fool of themselves, just to survive for now, even at the expense of self.
5. "... I do the right thing, everyone else must do the same - my way is the only way. Those who do not follow my way are a threat to me. They bring fear to my very existence, and expose my weakness" (18th Century attitudes)
6. Those who have saved all their life for retirement. They have been living in the future - living out of time.

There are natural disasters. You can't help it. We are taking adequate steps to minimise damage due to such things. Dooms day cannot happen. Such things

are being said from the past three-four decades. Something will be developed by man to meet the need. Such reports should be a sort of warning for all of us. □

STEMming the rot

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