



## We Live As If We Would Never Die and Die As If We Never Lived

**T**he human society has come eerily long way in its march to material progress, much ahead of the times when man used to live in the *Hobbesian* state of nature with his life being, 'nasty, brutish, poor and short'. Man's insatiable desire to make his life more comfortable has seen the rapid inventions and discoveries of newer things. But notwithstanding all this progress, have we as human beings, really learnt to live a life of comfort and dignity?

Human endeavours fuelled by unrestrained curiosities and desires have been unravelling mysteries of the universe and have also been successful in conquering the various elements of nature. With man scaling newer heights of progress and dreaming to colonise celestial bodies and with people like Stephen Hawking visualising man's journey into future, are we really satisfied with what we have? One is reminded of Jean Jacques Rousseau's ruminations and commentaries on human life.

In the "Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality", Rousseau described as to how 'man was living in a past golden age, prompted by conscience, not yet led astray by the harlotries of reason, uncorrupted by that perennial propagator of evil...that great deformer of man which calls itself society'. He speaks as to how man's self-love creates imaginary and utterly insatiable needs, which are so incompatible with man's instincts of sympathy. Today, we might have made our lives much more comfortable, but with every new discovery and every new invention, our simple, unsullied and sublime life has become more and more complicated.

While all these discoveries and inventions are intended at creating more happiness and comfort for the human beings, the fact remains that our lives have actually become more wretched and unhappy than we ever were. It is this phenomenon that people like Karl Marx, Herbert Marcuse and Louis Althusser have theorised as 'alienation'. They have talked of man having become lost in his self-created developmental maze. Today, man has got so alienated that the real happiness of life has been eluding him for quite some time now.

The Hindu mythology has long philosophised about the theory of *Karma*, as enunciated in *The Gita* whereby one is supposed to keep on doing one's *Karma* without any expectations. But we have all been doing exactly the opposite. Man's thirst for more and more carnal comforts has so dehumanised and alienated him that he has ceased to be a human being at all. Human beings have created societies, states, boundaries, communities, castes, religions, education systems, languages, monetary systems, hierarchies, multiple cultures and what not.

And today, man is busy managing the multiple contradictions and paradoxes emanating as a result thereof. We live each day of our life vying for more land, more money, more power and more status, something that we have ourselves created and something, which we shall leave behind once we complete our transient stint on this Blue Planet. We lose our happiness and comfort in the bargain for whose realisation we cherish those worldly possessions. This is what has been described as the '*Maya*' in Hindu mythology.

While Rousseau appeared to be at another extreme when he assailed the society (or what Sigmund Freud called 'Superego') for artificially creating so many fetters for human freedom, he forgets that but for those reasonable restraints, human life would have continued to remain 'nasty, brutish, poor and short' as Thomas Hobbes referred to life in the state of nature. However, this is also true that humans have increasingly been making their life increasingly more complex. While human craving to make his life more comfortable by way of newer scientific inventions and newer discoveries is very much in sync with his instincts to realise the real evolutionary potential pregnant in nature, still there are many things which have become anachronistic with the march of time and should cease to exist at the earliest possible.

One does get a feeling that human emphases have wrongly been on arrogant acquisitions and misplaced pleasures which believe more in snatching and taking than in giving and sharing. We have given too much importance to status and ersatz divisions among humans leading to constant strife and hatred in the society. The result has been the evaporation of the human feelings of shared happiness and corporate living. The delights of empathetic philanthropy and compassion don't inform our behaviour anymore.

Different cultures, languages, religions, mores, rituals and societies developed because they developed in isolation from each other in different geographical locations. Humans lived separately from each other in different parts of the world without knowing that there might exist any other society similar to them, as we exist in this universe in the sublime belief that we might be the only living planet in the cosmos. So, because of this segregated development of different human communities, we developed different languages to communicate with each other, different religions and culture to regulate our social life and different states to promise a safe and secure life. May be that is how the destiny willed it.

After all, all these varieties add colours to our life and make it more pulsating. But how can we justify the insular feelings stemming from these parochial creations. Today, we as a human being may not be interested in jingoistic patriotism or linguistic chauvinism, but we are supposed to be swayed by the politics informing these notions. Why can't we just enjoy our life just as a human being without being encumbered by the restrictions or the simulated

notions of communalism or nationalism? Why can't we decide to live anywhere, go anywhere and do anything as long as we don't impinge or hurt the sovereignty of other homo sapiens? This is more so when we know jolly well that our sojourn on this earth is transitory and ephemeral.

While answering the Yaksha's question about the 'greatest irony of life', Yudhisthir, a character in Indian mythology, had famously said that notwithstanding the fact that every human being knows that he is going to die one day, he lives as if he would never die. Really, many of us live as if we are never going to die while most of us die as if we never lived. Many thinkers do detest the baloney of human life which forces a man to live a full cycle of his life desiring newer acquisitions and trying to attain the same at any cost, compromising the quality and peace of life and eventually kicking the bucket leaving them all behind.

Today, the world has become so competitive that the man would not baulk at hurting others, snatching from others or conspiring against others in his bid to get ahead in life without thinking for a moment as to what he is losing in the bargain. The man loses a righteous life, a life full of sublime happiness and a life characterised by the values of sharing and caring, something which distinguishes him from other creatures of nature. It is here that the need for love comes in human life. It is this sublime love that is sadly missing in human society and it is this mutual love for each other which would make our society much more liveable than they are.

### Salient Points

- Man's self-love creates imaginary and utterly insatiable needs.
- Man has got lost in his self-created developmental maze.
- Man's thirst for more comforts has alienated him.
- The human feelings of shared happiness and corporate living have evaporated.
- Many of us live as if we are never going to die while most of us die as if we never lived.

### Glossary

**Astray:** away from right path

**Harlotry:** prostitution

**Carnal:** worldly

**Craving:** strong desire

**Alienation:** a state of depersonalisation or loss of identity caused by existential difficulties

**Anachronistic:** outdated

**Ersatz:** artificial

**Insular:** parochial

**Jingoism:** unreasonable love for one's country coupled with aggression for others

**Chauvinism:** irrational belief that one's country is better than others

**Sojourn:** a temporary stay

**Baloney:** nonsense

**Kicking the bucket:** to die

**Righteous:** morally right and justifiable

**Sublime:** something most admirable, causing awe and reverence