

Are we Happier Than Our Forefathers?

Or

Are We Happier Than Indians of 2000 Years ago?

Essay No. 01

“Happiness depends on what you can give, not what you can get.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Turning back the pages of history to ancient times, a modern man feels wonderstruck to see the hard life of human beings a few centuries ago. Our ancestor used to live in caves, ate uncooked food or depended upon fruit and leaves, walked long distances on foot. They could not get any clothes to cover their body and had not thought of getting shelter to hide their head. Their standard of living was no better than that of beasts. Like animals, they used to live in groups and fight other groups with bows, arrows and sticks for food, clothing or shelter.

But everything is destined to undergo a change in this world. The things of the past have become outdated today. Man used his scientific imagination, made a number of inventions and revealed the mysteries of nature. He started controlling the forces of nature. With the passage of time he went on marching ahead and soon became the master of the universe. He can now fly across the sky like a bird, swim across an ocean like a fish and communicate over long distances in no time. Today, with modern technology, man has been able to enjoy all facilities of life. Life is exceedingly comfortable, smooth and easy-going for him. The word ‘impossible’ does not find a place in his dictionary. He is able to get all the necessities of life.

A modern man enjoys himself in different ways. He is the master of the whole universe. When bored with his dull, mechanical routine, he has lots of means for entertainment. He has the video-cassette recorder to entertain himself. He has beautiful restaurants and hotels to go to. He has melodious musical extravaganzas and dance sequences packed up in his cassettes. His fertile creative mind had made him what his ancestors could never have thought of becoming in their entire life time.

But are we really happier than our forefathers? Definitely not. We have gained physical comforts at the cost of moral and spiritual values. We do not believe in God. We do not think of our moral upliftment. We think of our own comforts, not of others. We are too much entrapped in the snare of money. We are greedy, selfish, isolated, perturbed, dis-appointed and addicted to all sorts of vices. We have so many aspirations that life is full of frustration and depression. We have no pleasure or leisure, rest of peace, joy or contentment.

Man, today is, angry, proud, hypocritical, dishonest, insincere and tense. His life is full of frustration, agony and terror. He has no love for life and he does not brother to heed to the teaching to the teachings of great men like Guru Nanak Dev who once said:

Why hast thou forgotten God?

Anger has thou not forgotten

Not falsehood,

Why has thou forgotten truth?

Our ancestors enjoyed that inner joy that a modern man does not dream of having. The modern man has struck a very bad bargain. He has earned name, fame, position, status and physical comfort at the cost of inner joy, spiritual contentment and moral values. He has ascended the throne of God Himself. He knows how to fly in the air but has not learnt to live gracefully on the earth like a civilized citizen. The moral and spiritual progress is negligible as compared to the scientific progress.

Man, today, has money but he does not know the right use of it. He used his money to buy others and make them betray their conscience or their country. He has scientific knowledge but he is using it to create bombs, missiles and deadly armaments and this increases tension, fear and suspicion. He wants to enjoy himself at the cost of others. He does not mind indulging in a sort of cut-throat competition. He is as cruel, callous and unscrupulous in his ways as ever. No doubt, he is blessed with physical comforts but he is certainly far from being really contented and happy. The divinity in him is losing ground every day and he is becoming more and more a child of mere flesh and blood. May be he realizes his follies only when it is too late.

“O! my good lord, that comfort comes too late,

This like a pardon after execution;

That gentle physic, given in time had cured me,

But now I am past all comforts here but prayers.”

Essay No. 02

Are We Happier Than Our Forefathers?

The question, ‘Are we happier than our forefathers?’ is being repeatedly asked and discussed among educated circles. This is done in context of our phenomenal advancement in science and technology. Scientific development has given us such comforts as were unimaginable in the days of our forefathers. We have conquered the forces of nature, tamed the atom, reached the moon, pierced through the space, and yet we are not happy, contented, satisfied and actually pleased.

But why? is the big question. And perhaps, it is not so easy to answer.

There is a lot of controversy over the question. Why we are unhappy in spite of our great progress in every walk of life. Because of so fast means of communication, the distances have shrunk, the world has become smaller and more united. In the field of medicine and surgery we have made wonderful discoveries leading to eradication and control of many diseases which were considered fatal by our forefathers. Machines of various kinds, shapes and sizes have almost revolutionised our life. There are machines for domestic use, machines for agriculture and farming, for office use, machines for mining and excavation, machines for recording, reproduction, etc. Then there are radio, television, electricity, space-shuttles, satellites, nuclear-powered-ships, and atomic reactors producing much needed energy. And in comparison, to this life full of luxury, comfort, convenience and ease, think of the life of our forefathers, say a hundred years. ago. We are virtually in a brave new world, having a life full of all comforts, leisure and pleasure. We need not shed our sweat in work. Our life has become longer, healthier and more comfortable, but certainly not happier.

We should draw a dividing line between comforts, convenience, ease and real happiness. No doubt with the so wonderful gifts of science life has become very comfortable; the world has almost turned into a fairy land, but happiness is a state of mind. It does not lie in things of comfort and convenience. All these so-called amenities and wonders of life have made our lives artificial, hollow and devoid of real charm and delight.

Our inner and real-self is being starved and stifled. In this world of scientific advancement, the human values such as love, affection, sentiments, sympathy, compassion, etc., have been gradually marginalized. Man has become more and more selfish. He has become too much money-minded. The world is too much with us. Of what use is the possession of the whole world, if the soul is lost? The curse of King Midas has descended on mankind. Because of gross material pursuits,

spiritualism and religion are on the wane. We have no time for beauties of nature, for poetry and arts, and for culture. Science without religion and spiritualism is blind. As such, it has led us to more and more unhappiness and discontentment. The rich hurry and divided aims are the real bane of our present-day life. We are going at a great speed, but do not know what is our destination. This blind race leads us to no-where to no purpose. We have produced various types of nuclear bombs. These monstrous weapons can destroy the whole world in no time many times over. The human race has arrived at a point where a slight mistake, a single miscalculation, a wrong move can destroy it forever. In such gloomy and devastating circumstances how can we feel happy and glad. The chances of the third World War are menacingly hovering over the horizon. Gas and bacteriological warfare has further added to the gloom and hopelessness. The misuses of scientific discoveries and inventions have turned our life into a bitter one. We feel so dehumanised and disillusioned. Is it not an irony of fate?

No doubt our forefathers had no such amenities and comforts. They suffered from many fatal diseases, epidemics and ignorance in matters of hygiene. They did not have schools, colleges, universities and other institutions of higher learning and professional training. They were superstitious. There were no good means of communication and entertainment. They had no control over such calamities as floods, famines, earthquakes, storms, fires, etc. But at the same time, they did not suffer from the many ills and evils of modern life. They were simple, honest, loving, charitable, compassionate, sympathetic and sensible. They possessed their soul and were ever guided by ethical, moral and human values in all their doings and thinking. And so they possessed their inner poise, calm happiness and contentment in spite of many handicaps in the realm of materialism and possession. Modern life, full of scientific gadgets and devices, has become a curse than a blessing. The ever-increasing material pursuits have shaken our faith in God and ourselves at the very foundation. Sans happiness, spiritual joy and moral satisfaction, man has been drifting aimlessly, overawed by the wonderful comforts of life, in the vast sea of gross materialism and possession.

When the human values are at a stake, the very existence of mankind is uncertain, how one can be happy, contented or satisfied. Those who think that they are happier than their forefathers are really living in a fool's paradise. The sooner they are disillusioned the better. Surely material possessions have never been a recipe for happiness. Because of this materialism our hearts no more leap up at the sight of a rainbow, the glorious sun rise or the other charms of nature. See what William Wordsworth has said: The world is too much with us; late and soon,

Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers: Little we see in Nature that is ours.

Are We Happier Than Our Forefathers?

If we are to judge happiness in terms of ease of living, the answer to the question would undoubtedly be “yes”: no one can deny. Modern science has achieved so much to lighten our day-to-day jobs that if our forefathers were to return today, they would not recognize the conditions as belonging to the same planet. Man, today finds everything ready for him. An electric switch moves a fan above him giving him far more comfort and coolness than the punkha of our forefathers. The motor-car of today can carry us to a far greater distance and in a much shorter time. We have not to burn the Kerosene oil or the linseed oil to read in the night; we can just switch on the light without any bad smell. There are innumerable inventions of science which have made our lives easy and happy.

But are we really happy? Are we happy in the real sense of the term? Are we healthier than our forefathers? The answer to all these questions, we all feel in our hearts is ‘no’. We have become ease-loving idle persons. We do not like to do any manual work. Manual work lowers our dignity these days. We do not want to give our bodies a physical exercise. The result is that we are not healthy. We suffer from various diseases. No doubt, medicine has advanced a lot but what of that? Do we not know the proverb of our forefathers, “Prevention is better than cure”?

Our forefathers used to get everything pure. They had cereals. Today it seems that everything and even man is adulterated. The people have to use Dalda; they have to remain content with milk adulterated with about 60 per cent of water, condiments mixed up with so many harmful substances. As a result, the people suffer from various diseases. Did our forefathers ever hear of the complicated diseases like cancer or pleurisy?

In the olden days, when a man wanted something, he set to work upon it. When he had finished, even though the work was not very good, he had the sense of satisfaction and got the joy of a creator. This made the people’s lives adventurous. Now-a-days everybody in this world expects to have things “ready-made” for him and so the spirit of adventure has gone out of life.

But all this does not mean that we should become disappointed and discard what has been achieved so far. There are still a great many things to be made, discovered and invented. We should not forget our spiritual values. And if we continue to use our minds and hands in searching after beautiful things, the day will not be far when we will be as happy as our forefathers.