

The False Progress: Why have human beings sacrificed the culture of idleness for the culture of work?

Bertrand Russell's 1932 seminal essay *In Praise Of Idleness* is very relevant to the quality of life we live today, as it was then. The mankind has obviously improved human life in many significant ways since 1932. We have much better physical, economic, political, and social conditions. Man is more confident in the eternal battle with his arch nemesis, nature. But if the improvements in the human condition have been so huge then where is the problem? The problems lie in the realms of man's psychological and emotional state, also known as the state of happiness. Are human beings happier than they were in pre-Industrial revolution? I believe they are not. I also believe this is because the changes brought by the technological revolution have significantly snipped and corroded the psychological and emotional fields of man's life. Today's man is a badge number in a factory, where together with the commuting time he expends on his job, he spends half of his day. At work he is essentially alone, as the modern social and efficiency cultures inhibit and dissuade him to be more engaging and warmer with his fellow workers than he is. The torture of commuting between home and work is further exacerbated by the torment of the family life. Today's spousal relationships are cold, calculated, competitive, romantically lean, and bereft of the cultural and social commitments of the past. Sex is the big candy dangling in the spousal magnetic field - over glorified by the modern vision of life. Sex has been there between men and women ever since Eve could not resist taking a bite of the forbidden, though exciting apple, but the older cultures used it with taste, style, and balance. Rejecting all the wisdom of thousands of years that has accrued to man, the Technology Age has carved out some of its own understandings, values, and visions of the process of human life, which in the long run will harm the humankind than help it.

Bertrand Russell points how the moral significance of work has been inculcated

by the rich in the poor. Most of the rich people not only savor idleness but deem it to be a scintillating value of life. But as someone has to work, to keep the human community running, the poor are the appropriate workers to do so.

Work alone has not contributed to the immense progress of the mental and physical aspects of the mankind. Ideas have played a critical role in them. And many of them have come from the state of human life called leisure. Most of the inspired and brilliant idea creators lead leisurely lives. Stress robs man of power to reflect and play with his imagination. Creative people need leisure to fire their imaginations. They are a small number of people, compared to the total human population, which have created the significant changes to human life. Changes not only in the physical life but also in the political, social, cultural, and scientific life of the mankind. Innovative ideas require thinking and dreaming, concentrated and continuous involvement with them, tranquil mental and relaxed physical states, both inner and outer, and friendly social and political environment. Conditions that can only be cultivated from the fabric of leisure. Even religion can not be practiced in the state of physical turbulence and mental agitation.

Today's high gear life was not designed by anyone but is the consequence of man's immense greed for economic gains and a vast misunderstanding of human nature. Newtonian revolution boosted man's self confidence immensely. He started to believe he could pry the mystery of nature and in doing so do away with God and emotional interdependence of people, and live with science as his supreme guide. The result of this attitude in two-hundred years has been that man is lonelier and less enchanted with life, even though he is healthier, lives longer, and works much harder. The new culture believes man should get super active, live with independence and freedom, make a lot of money, indulge in natural and man-made physical stimulants, and mind his business. Unfortunately, this prescription for happiness has not been very successful. Stressed by brutal demands of work, loneliness, the thinness of the emotional connections with other human beings, and possessing low spiritual inspiration to live, today's man is not living to the level human life can be lived. An individual's thinking capability can not make much dent in the structural forces of the culture he lives in, which significantly shape his life.

America is the most successful example of the ambitions and aspirations that were engendered by the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath. While its people have the best economic health among the nations, and they live in a high degree of political freedom, but the quality of their happiness is fragile, unreliable, and turbid. We can not confuse their level of energy with the level of their happiness. Being busy all the time is not happiness but a state of intoxication. When one is afraid to stop working for the fear of the state of unhappiness to overtake us then work is not happiness but a sedative. Work does give structure to life but it has to be work that inspires us. Without mental connections happiness is impossible. The amount of sleeping tablets, tranquilizers, and anti-depressants Americans take is colossal and unequivocally points out their cultural inadequacies. We have not taken into account the extent of drug use and the extent of crime rampant in this great country. Other industrialized countries experience the same maladies. At least a human being or a society should aim at happiness to be happy but it is only exceptional people who can break the cultural cage to acquire it.

The Age Of Technology has made man isolated more than he should be. There are special individuals for whom isolation can lead to creativity and moral acumen but for common man it is stifling. The burden of loneliness for modern man is too high a price to pay for his economic gains. Family is no longer the lowest common denominator of society but an individual is. This has lead to a warped vision of mankind. Man cannot survive on this planet unless he thinks in terms of mankind.

Idea is the bedrock of our mind. Without it mind will be empty and colorless. And with that life will be an empty cocoon just driven by the physical machinery. Animals also live but they do not possess the grandeur of human mind. Modern man's mind is mostly used for solving practical problems and does not soar in the firmament of his imagination. With the result he lives much below his potential. Religion, art, and science are three of the greatest creations of man. If we do not pursue them without our whole spirit we are living mediocre lives. This message got squeezed out a good bit since the Industrial Revolution as the economic progress took ascendancy over the finer things of life. To live without the sense

that human life is a great experience and pregnant with high possibilities has reduced the quality of life.

Mammoth amounts of money are being expended by nations to prepare themselves to defend themselves in case another nation attacks them. This is such an insane idea that an introspection on it boomerangs to the thinker with a lethal radiation. It would have been realistic for the nations to have some defense against a human-level attack but what defense can you have against a nuclear attack because killing your attacker on a mass level would be a suicide for the mankind.

Competition at a cut-throat level in politics, business, academia, and in other human walks has stifled the spirit of the participants to achieve perfection. In a short time that a human being lives what is the need to dry the wells of their inspiration to achieve brilliant results of their work. Almost everywhere in modern life we see forces that want to extinguish human spirit, encouraging ego and greed. The latter support the twin demons that poison the inherent grandeur of idealism and a sense of beauty man is born with.

What is missing in modern mind is 'spiritualism?' Spiritualism in the sense of closeness to nature, idealism, pursuit of beauty, truthfulness, and perfectionism. Modern man only thinks of clever ways to achieve things but pays scant attention to the connection with the "spirit" he is born with. I do not have the slightest doubt that in some fifty to hundred years from now when the lust for materialism wanes in this segment of human history, the "spirituality" of man will be reborn. He will restart seeing cosmos with different eyes.

Suffern, New York, June 7, 2014

www.kaulscorner.com

maharaj.kaul@yahoo.com