

Man of Our Age

From the point of view of the availability of the facilities of life, the man of our age has reached a grand stage. The innumerable discoveries and inventions have provided him such opportunities as previously appeared to him totally fantastic.

The automatic appliances and electronic implements have made many such things possible for the man of our age, which were hitherto impossible. By just pressing a button he can obtain whatever he wants. Water, air, heat, cold, food and clothing are all readily available for him.

Radio waves in the twinkling of an eye carry his voice to the farthest corner of the world; not only his voice but his picture also.

The aircraft have subdued vastness of the space for him. With ease and speed he flies from one side of the world to another, even more easily, more lightly and to a greater distance than the legendary flying carpet.

The astronauts have opened the way for him to the planets, and now a journey to the moon and other planets appears to be as simple as going from one city to another neighboring city.

The new scientific and industrial discoveries have so expanded in our age that it is difficult to enumerate them. It may be said that nature is now bent upon disclosing in the shortest possible time to the man of our century all the innumerable secrets which it held in its bosom for thousands of years.

As the result of his expanding acquaintance with the secrets of nature and his marvelous discoveries in regard to the controlling and exploiting the natural forces, the man of our age has reached the zenith of material well being and has converted the whole earth into a well furnished and magnificent place for his own benefit, in order to be able to lead a contented life and secure that happiness of which he has always dreamt.

Greedy Animals

This was one side of the coin, but there is another side of it too. The material civilization of today has solved many problems of human life, and has given man dazzling power to control nature. But at the same time it has so much eulogized and puffed the philosophy of having more and more, that it has made the man of our age a greedy animal, who is day and night worried about only increasing the production and consumption and thinks of nothing else.

Materialism and too excessive concern about economic affairs have converted man into a machine. He is always busy with earning his livelihood or finding the means of leading a more and more luxurious life. This situation is so wide-spread that the life of most of the men of our times is almost devoid of any other valuable content.

There was a time when man valued his freedom most and even sacrificed his life for the sake of it. Now he has become a slave of production and consumption and has laid down his love of freedom at the altar of this deity.

With the progress of material civilization, the consuming needs of man have increased and the way of meeting them has grown complex to the extent that many people sacrifice their physical and moral well-being for achieving that end.

In the material society of today all higher human values have been set aside, or, it may be said, that even moral values are looked upon only from material angle. In most parts of the world the real infrastructure of education and training is only material and aims at economic gain. The actual purpose of framing any educational or training program is only to produce men who can provide better economic return for the pockets of others or sometimes for their own pockets. The motto of every one, from a man in the street to the elite, has become "achieve economic gain and material pleasures ensuing from it".

The specialists in higher intellectual and technical fields, the politicians, the writers and the artists are no exception to this rule. Even many of those who are devoted to higher spiritual questions have been affected by material and economic attractions. Missionary work is performed mostly in exchange for financial and material remuneration. This situation is the natural and inevitable result of the diverse material philosophies prevailing during our times.

Day and night man is being told that he is no more than an economic animal, and that wealth and economic prosperity are the sole criterion of good fortune and the only sign of the progress of a nation, a class or a group. It is constantly being drummed into the ears of people that money has a miraculous power and it can solve every problem. There is always a talk of the heaps of money obtained by chance

or by directly or indirectly robbing the fellow human beings and spent for satisfying the lowest animal desires.

In these circumstances it is not surprising that men or rather semi-men of our age have turned into greedy animals, bent upon acquiring money from whatever source they can and spending it for obtaining the greatest possible pleasure. They have become the slaves of production and consumption. Their life is bereft totally of the higher values befitting a living human being, and has tended towards vulgarity and degradation.

Quest for the philosophy of life and its aim

It is a matter of great satisfaction that here and there some new voices have arisen in this very world enamoured of production and consumption. They give rise to the hope that perhaps time has come for the deliverance of the man of our age from the shackles of this economic myth. It is more gratifying that these voices pertain to the youth rather than the middle-aged or the aged people.

For some time the youth throughout the whole world have been showing practical reaction and saying loudly that they find their life meaningless and vulgar in the magnificent palace which has been furnished for them.

They want to know:

If people generally are happy in this magnificent palace.

If the boat of their life filled with all sorts of comforts and travel equipment shall carry them to the shore of peace and content.

Whether this splendid civilization attaches any importance to man himself.

Whether all the gadgets invented to facilitate life really serve man, or they themselves have appropriated all his mental and physical capabilities.

Whether this splendid civilization which has so much reduced distance between various cities, continents and planets, and converted them into just a big house, has also brought the hearts of its inmates closer to each other, or in spite of reduction in distances their hearts have gone further apart, or even worse than that, they no longer possess any hearts, as man now has only brain and hands exclusively devoted to serve his stomach, to satisfy his lust and to help him seek self, position and similar other objects:

It is true that such voices strike only in the lands where people lead an economically prosperous life and

are not preoccupied with the worry of obtaining such primary necessities as bread and butter.

It is also true that in most parts of the world there are still large masses of people who are stricken with poverty and they themselves, their families, their dependents and their neighbors are leading a life below subsistence level. Their only hope now is a bloody revolution that may put an end to their material and economic privation.

But the correct foresight makes it necessary that the efforts of these under-privileged people should be channeled in such a direction that they may not have to face such a fate.

Anyhow, it is certain that the people have more or less awakened and have got rid of the charm of material and economic prosperity. Both the big camps of the modern world now see clearly that:

Though for centuries man has been making efforts to secure the best possible means of living a better life, at present in both the big camps of the East and the West men are being sacrificed ruthlessly in the grand industrial temples at the feet of the deity of industry. Except empty slogans there is nothing left of human dignity, human freedom and real choice in either of the two camps. Both the systems have deprived man of his dignity on the pretext that that is the requirement of the speedy running of the wheels of the complex modern industry and economy.

Anyway, the man of our age is no longer willing to be taught by means of industry and technology how to lead his life.

He persistently insists that he should know what the aim of his life is.

Contrary to what the pessimists think, the voices which are now being raised in protest or otherwise, may be a forerunner of the happy and propitious self-realization. They may give rise to human self-awakening and a renaissance of human society. They may induce man not to take mechanical development for human evolution, and to rediscover the real goal of his life with deeper insight. They may lead him in the direction of real human bliss. What does the Qur'an say in this respect?

The Qur'an emphasizes as a principle that all the pomp and show of life is meaningless, if it is devoid of faith and spirituality and is not consistent with the aim befitting a human being. A man enamoured of such a life is a loser and all his efforts are in vain.

"Know that the life of this world is only a sport and pastime, pageantry and cause of boasting among you, and a quest for more wealth and more children. It is like the vegetation springing out after rain, delights the farmers, but it withers and you see it turning yellow, and then becoming worthless stubble". (Surah al-Hadid 57:20).

At another place Allah has been described as the light of the heavens and the earth, the truth and the directing spirit of the whole world.

Then there is a mention of the meritorious and worthy men whom their trade and the efforts to earn their livelihood do not beguile into forgetting of Allah and do not divert them from the basic goal of their life. They consequently secure the best results. Their efforts are always fruitful and conducive to virtue and excellence.

The Qur'an describes the fate of those who have no aim in life and are forgetful of Allah:

"As for those who disbelieve, their deeds are like a mirage in a desert. The thirsty man thinks that it is water, but when he comes to it, he finds that it is nothing. There he finds only. Allah, who pays him his account in full, and Allah is swift at reckoning. Or as darkness in a deep ocean covered with dashing waves and overcast with clouds. Several kinds of darkness, one upon another. If one stretches his hand, he can hardly see it. Indeed the man from whom Allah withholds His light, can find no light at all". (Surah al-Nur 24: 39 - 40).

Consider these verses well. They contain a truth, which has become far more evident following the great scientific and industrial progress and the expansion of the dimensions of human life.

Purely material life is as good as a mirage. The efforts of a greedy and covetous man bear no fruit, for they are devoid of a direction and a meaning. There is darkness all around. The people are puzzled and submerged in vulgarity. The question still remains: What is the meaning of life and what is its goal?

According to the Qur'an the real cause of all this confusion and vulgarity is that human life has been bereft of the element of *iman* and man is concentrating his efforts on material progress. He has entered an era of production for consumption and consumption for production. Such people may succeed to the utmost degree in achieving their material ends but beyond that they fail in securing what is worthy of a human being:

The Qur'an says:

"Those who want the life of this world and its pomp, shall be fully recompensed according to their deeds during their lifetime. They shall not suffer any loss here. But in the Hereafter they shall have nothing but the fire. All they have done here shall have no value and all their deeds shall be null and void". (Surah Hud, 11 : 15 - 16).

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/philosophy-islam-sayyid-muhammad-husayni-beheshti-muhammad-jawad-bahonar/man-our-age>