

# Happy Meaningful Life

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© Author

**Hazara Singh**

*Formerly Head*

Department of Journalism, Languages & Culture

Punjab Agricultural University

Ludhiana

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Dedicated to my esteemed teacher  
Ch. Amar Das Saini  
Who arranged my admission to a college

Happiness is not about what happens. It is about  
how we perceive 'what happens to us'.

It is the knack of finding a positive for every  
negative and viewing a set-back as a challenge.

It is not wishing for what we don't have, but  
enjoying what we have.

## Foreword

It is a privilege to write Foreword to a book written by Prof. Hazara Singh, an octogenarian, particularly when he states that he felt prompted to compile this text at my suggestion. How gratifying that an informal observation led to a worthwhile exercise !

The unique feature of this book is its adherence to a rational but humane outlook. It bubbles with optimism. Its structure comprising four sections, viz. 'Attitudes', 'Old Age', 'Resurgence' and 'Glimpses from Personal Life' unfolds the theme in a lucid manner.

Attitudes are the very foundation of life, rather the salt of its existence. For the lucky few it gets laid through their childhood bringing up. The others, for the aspired progress, can rely on appropriate attitudes. This is what he persuasively pleads.

For facing the dilemma between 'overindulgence', often reprov'd as a vice and 'self-denial', exalted as virtue, he puts forth that neither reckless merriment nor abnegation is a path to happiness. He holds that the relationship between needs and desires is not strictly dogmatic. This understanding is quite vital, because under the influence of old concepts, when new avenues relating to health, education and career pursuits were still unexplored, many people tended to freeze their needs by avoiding even normal facilities considering them to be greed-based or excessive. The author suggests a rational approach through a moderation of restraints and the adequate needs.

'Living Twenty Four Hours a Day' is a fascinating piece : logical, straightforward and practicable.

The text gleams with corroborating quotations from his poems. Tips for old age are appealing. Based on them, the readers may develop suitable individual patterns. Learning to manage old age is going to be crucial in the coming decades. Thanks to the advances in medical science that persons in large number are likely to achieve old age to an unprecedented scale. The Vedic exhortation,

'Jeevena Sardassadam', (let us live for hundred years)

is going to be possible for most of us. Hence, learning the management of old age is important.

In 'Glimpses from Personal Life' he narrates the pursuits which enabled him to march towards a gratifying phase mainly through attitudinal approach. 'Secrets of Longevity' propose constructive old age pastime.

Despite slight disagreement with any of his observations, it cannot be denied that they do certainly stimulate positive thinking and stir an urge for self-rejuvenation.

The verse in 'Destination' (a sort of epilogue) is superb. It conveys subtle ideas which can not be so effectively communicated through prose. I quote three stanzas therefrom :

In academic pursuits I got distinction  
During career race I was often ignored  
As I had the audacity not to acquiesce  
And stuck fearlessly to righteous goal.  
  
Many rightful rewards were thus snatched  
But they served to strengthen my resolve  
Though pushed back yet kept in the track  
My grit encouraged the weak and wavering.  
  
If all of us resolve to strive thus  
To improve the world as best we can  
Sorrow and suffering would fade out  
The earth will become heaven itself.

I recommend that this book be read by all — young as well as old.

I pray to God to grant Prof. Hazara Singh vibrant happy 100 years so that he continues to share his dynamic thoughts with fellow beings.

Y.S. Rajan

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## Preface

As an impact of the concept of 'equality, fraternity and democracy', aspirations like human rights, dignity of individual, world brotherhood and global peace started stirring academic pursuits, giving rise, thus, to the quest for a 'new man' and a 'new world'. *Happy Meaningful Life* is an endeavour to project the ideas and suggest the pursuits which may lead towards that goal.

'Attitudes' therein describe as to how the way of living may be transformed for making it meaningful and correspondingly rewarding. As one keeps learning from cradle to grave, so the role of senior citizens has been discussed extensively in this context.

A person starts becoming a useful constituent of society when he :

sets to improve himself, inspired by his grooming or impelled by inner urges ;

strives earnestly to rear his family by becoming an ideal parental model;

influences people around him for their onward transformation, and, thus,

serves his nation to make it a considerate and not a rapacious member of the evolving global set-up.

For such a beneficial goal, he has to be innovative which requires the adopting of scientific temper. This rational attitude goads him to re-evaluate traditional beliefs and values. The probing approach lends him mental clarity and humanist outlook, committing him along with to work for the uplift of fellow beings.

'Resurgence' explores as to how the leading Fundamental Duties, incorporated in our Constitution viz. :

to develop scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform ;

to render national service;

to strive towards excellence in all spheres of individual and collective activity, etc.

can be performed satisfactorily.

India has taken significant strides since the middle of nineteenth century, when it was preached that it was a sin to sail overseas. There are people of Indian origin in more than a dozen developed countries. The descendants of those who were taken to foreign countries as indentured labour or of the ones who migrated subsequently in search of careers are among the Nobel Laureates. Such celebrities visit their ancestral land eagerly in search of roots. They go back dejected on finding that India with the exception of a few flourishing pockets, here and there, is still, a land of grinding poverty, shocking ignorance and repelling intolerance. The oldest oppressive order, caste system, that deprives fellow beings of social equality and denies them dignity, is raging widely unnoticed in India. The other wicked systems like racial segregation and totalitarian regimes are fading fast. The latest among them, religious fundamentalism, extending its tentacles as global terrorism, is being confronted at international level. But the caste system which branded fellow beings as 'touch-me-nots' and 'untouchables' is keeping still its tenacious hold. 'Resurgence' diagnoses the malady, suggesting corresponding remedy.

'Glimpses from Personal Life' narrate as to how even common place positive precepts influence tender minds. Once stirred, they do not look back, but proceed determinedly towards the chosen goal.

It is pertinent to refer to a personal happening. In early 2001, my health started deteriorating. Before leaving for USA for treatment, I left the poem 'Destination' with the editor of a poetry journal for publishing it after my, almost likely, demise as my swan-song. I survived the serious health set-back. 'Old Age Health Problems' share my experience thereof. 'Destination' has been appended to that.

*Happy Meaningful Life* comprises articles contributed to various journals and the occasional radio talks. Repetition of references to certain events could not be eliminated, but has been minimized. Pieces in verse have been implanted here and there for lending lively touches to expression. The Preface exhorts :

'Peruse, ponder and proceed with purposeful pursuits'.

## **Attitudes**

Attitudes lead to magnitude

# I

## Purposeful Life

Before discussing the aspirations of a purposeful life, it may be worthwhile to be clear as to what life stands for.

Life is neither an illusory dream nor a punishment as has been stressed by a few religious beliefs. Scientific ideas and the sociological advances have revealed that human life is an ongoing process in the cycle of biological evolution. Hence it is real and worth-living with an urge to keep it improving.

Some scriptures lay down that happiness is the quotient of basic needs as numerator and the worldly desires as denominator. When both these urges are rendered equal, a human being is believed to have achieved peace of mind and the consequent happiness.

Every human being notwithstanding his birth – high or low – has an intrinsic worth, varying in nature and degree, i.e. he has a talent or aptitude peculiar to himself. If that quality or inclination is not suppressed but developed towards constant improvement, that makes life purposeful instead of its remaining a mere existence. Gradual betterment of that inherent talent or skill creates self-confidence, gives job satisfaction, brings recognition and all these make life purposeful.

## Impracticable Beliefs

For understanding one's qualitative worth or to be more appropriate for 'knowing oneself', a lot of inhibitions or prejudices have to be re-evaluated.

There had been two views, diametrically opposed to each other, regarding the quest for happiness. Many recluses have

been sermonizing that if the desires arising from physical urges are firmly controlled through abnegation, happiness increases correspondingly. When the desires get controlled to zero, happiness becomes infinite or a sort of divine bliss is attained.

Is such a course practicable for an average human being? The reply is a spontaneous 'no'. Those who profess to have achieved such a rigid control over desires are often detected to be observing double standards of living; what they condemn as a vice in public, they succumb to the same in private.

The simple natured people who start believing in the virtue of self-denial, but find it hard to practise, begin to get infected with a sense of guilt. Self-pity keeps them disturbed with a gnawing fear that they would be punished after death for their lapses. The inner conflict goads them to a desperate resolve that if after death, punishment is inevitable, why forego the worldly pleasures. They, thus, become reckless in their day-to-day life.

The aforesaid mode of quest for happiness produces either hypocrites or desperadoes. This attitude, being impracticable for worldly life, seeks to be re-evaluated.

Another extreme view held by those, who ridicule spiritualists as escapists and call themselves worldly or materialist, is 'Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die'. This attitude, which aims at satisfying all desires instead of curbing them, leads to moral bestiality and widespread debauchery.

Hence neither abnegation nor reckless indulgence is a path to happiness. A modest moderation of both is an advisable approach.

## Needs and Desires

Human needs are no longer confined to *roti, kapda* and *makan* i.e. food, clothing and shelter. The concept of a welfare state has enlarged the net of basic needs to include the right to health, education, employment, recreation and assistance during want.

As social equality and human dignity have been laid down as fundamental rights for all human beings notwithstanding gender, colour, creed and race, physical desires which get wild under the impact of vices like greed, arrogance, lust and wrath have to be restrained accordingly so that their exercise does not deprive others of dignity and reputation.

Desires are not always base. If they crave for the satisfaction of physical urges only, they require to be controlled so that they do not hold a threat to public order and morality. When they yearn for self-improvement and betterment of society, they are called aspirations and deserve appreciation as well as emulation.

Those, who after securing the needs of life begin to feel complacent, do so at the cost of further self-improvement. The urge to keep acquiring and admiring knowledge, gathering and sharing experiences and, above all, cheering the wavering and assisting the needy should never be given up.

The fact may also not be overlooked that the advent of modern era had been possible only because a handful of pioneers and researchers disregarding starvation, hardship, loneliness and ridicule carried on a persistent crusade against myths, superstitions, ignorance and the retrogressive forces, which sapped the joy of living. Those who willingly forewent even their primary needs have done more for bettering human life through their discoveries and inventions than the ones who curbed their desires. Hence the relationship between needs and desires is not strictly dogmatic.

### **Positive Approach**

A negative attitude towards life is as harmful as the rigid dogmas and prejudices are. The imposing of too many 'do not's' on children under the garb of discipline makes them unnecessarily suspicious of their elders, because it is human nature to find out and try secretly whatever is being forbidden. The directions like 'Do not tell a lie', 'Do not disobey your elders', 'Do not steal', etc. can be conveyed in a positive manner as 'Speak truth', 'Respect your elders', 'Be honest' respectively. A direction in the form of 'Do not' leads to the raising of eyebrows.

A positive approach earns mutual trust resulting in willing cheerful compliance. If the parents, preceptors and preachers become positive in their communication and remain consistent in their words and deeds, the younger generation is bound to imbibe a purposeful approach to life.

It offends human dignity to call any manual work as menial or low. An artisan is as much a creative worker as an artist. A cleaner of house and public places deserves due consideration like a saint, because cleanliness is complementary to godliness. The latter exalts individuals but the former benefits society as a whole.

Developing a hobby for fruitful leisure is not going astray as many orthodox preceptors prescribe. Pursuit of a hobby helps in discovering and improving one's inherent worth. If that quality, peculiar to oneself, is developed, it imparts satisfaction as well as earns distinction. In case, the said talent aims at exclusive self-advancement, it may end in vanity and avarice, which are the antitheses of happiness. When it is dedicated to make the world better than the one in which one was born, it lends grace and humility to self, fetches admiration and adds to universal happiness.

It is never too late to find a purpose for life. Never whine that a greater part of life has been wasted in unrewarding pursuits. Even after retirement, one can determine a purpose for life according to experience, aptitude and resources. Have some positive vision and set in pursuit thereof. The thinker who floated the idea that in future :

- (i) if anybody commits a crime, he will not be sent to jail but treated in a mental hospital to cure him of the delinquency which impelled him to resort to that harmful course; and
  - (ii) if one falls ill he will not be taken to a hospital but jailed for not having observed preventive care,
- revolutionized the way of looking at the problems of society.

What a thought-provoking idea to preach and practise ! It is destined to transform the world into heaven on earth itself. Hence ponder and act. Life becomes a barren routine from the day one gives up thinking and acting. Either of the two may suffice. Thinking suggests but acting thereupon achieves. Mostly it is the action that matters. Hence strive to live twenty four hours a day. Is it possible ? Surely.

••••

## II

### Living Twenty Four Hours a Day

Living twenty four hours a day implies to make the best use of available time through proper co-ordination of work, rest and leisure. It often ensures greatness in pages of history. Those unable to extend their routine beyond eating, roaming and sleeping become either a source of nuisance or a burden on society.

The qualities which make one's work productive, the rest recuperative and the leisure fruitful are regular habits, methodical nature, imaginative mind, clear head and co-operative attitude. The antitheses get inflicted through indolence, casualness, unsteadfastness and narrow mindedness. Let us illustrate these observations.

A boy was given to grumbling that he did not have enough time to attend to various assignments. His father advised,

“Make your day longer.”

The son shot back,

“The day consists of twenty four hours only.

It can't be stretched like a rubber band.”

The experienced elder observed,

“If you get up early, the day will get longer correspondingly.”

The son learnt a valuable lesson. He gave up lolling in bed. He would start his work with a fresh mind. He was able to attend to his studies with a sense of achievement. This earned a pat from his parents and a smiling nod from teachers. The

self-confidence lent him steadfastness. He could spare time to take part in extra-curricular activities also and, thus, learnt the value of team-spirit. What a change in his growing up ! From a lad doomed to become a delinquent, he rose to be a promising offspring.

Hence the first moral of a full life :

‘Idleness retards, earnestness rewards’.

Many people waste a lot of time in offering excuses that they could not do this or that for paucity of time, unfavourable weather, indisposition, etc. Methodical approach to work saves a lot of time. Where there is a will, there is a way. Hence it does not hold that inclement weather or a slight indisposition could stand in the way of attending to an obligation. It had been mainly due to casual attitude or the habit of putting off till next day what could be done on that very day, rather than that very moment, which resulted in cutting a sorry figure before friends. Stray actions constitute irregular habits, which develop into an unsteady character. As time and tide wait for none, persons given to indolence and casualness seldom rise to the occasion. They are looked down upon as men of straw. Those who catch time by the forelock keep rising high on the ladder to success with a sense of gratification for themselves and also become a source of inspiration for others.

Hence the second moral :

‘The opportunities not availed of reflect a wasted life’.

Nature has blessed every creature with certain innate qualities. Strive to discover those inborn gifts and leave no stone unturned to develop them into excellence. Once, a clear idea gets formed about the goal, the imaginative mind acts like a fountainhead of energy, patience and fortitude. H.G. Wells lost his father during infancy. His mother, who supported him by working as a house maid, could only think of getting him trained as a shop assistant with a cloth merchant. Wells aspired to become a science teacher. He weighed the pros and cons. His mother had deposited her hard earned money

for his apprenticeship charges. In case he did not pursue the training, the fees paid would go waste to her bitter disappointment. If he abided by her wishes, an uneasy feeling would continue to gnaw his mind that he was destined for some other position in life. On receiving encouragement from one of his teachers, he gave up that training for pursuing education. Sobs of the widowed mother did not weaken his resolve. Poverty did not deter him, because God helps those who help themselves. He rose to be a distinguished man of letters who innovated science fiction. As a founder member of Fabian Society, he popularised scientific temper, which shows the path to people at large for discarding superstitions, re-evaluating the myths and re-appraising the old beliefs for enriching human life. Abraham Lincoln, another benefactor of humanity, by dint of qualities mentioned afore, rose from Log Cabin to White House. The world would have been poorer in thought and deeds, had persons like Abraham Lincoln and Wells not heeded to their inner voice and been lulled, instead, to a life of ease by ordinary achievements.

The third moral :

‘Resolve to leave the world nobler and richer than the one in which you were born by developing your innate qualities through precept and practice’.

The Indian society would have been still stagnant and slave had there not been reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Viveka Nand and Mahatama Gandhi, gifted with the qualities of head and heart.

‘Work is worship’ is a golden saying. But worship must have a purpose; lofty and noble. Lord Buddha preached that ignorance was the worst sin. Lious Pasteur exclaimed that selfless service of mankind was a sublime form of worship. Bhagat Puran Singh, Mother Teressa and Mahatma Amte, the conscience keepers of resurging India, have upheld this gospel.

Strive to lead a full life, but learn to share its fruit with the needy through social service by helping the cause of education, health-care, rehabilitation of the displaced, etc. Even if you are leading a retired life, find time to counsel the wayward, cheer the gloomy and comfort the distressed. This mode of service is more redeeming than seeking renunciation for individual salvation. The concept of a welfare state calls for the collective improvement of present. Never let the feeling enter your mind that a single swallow cannot make the summer. It is likely that a few people may ridicule your sense of service. The greatest quality of a social reformer is his faith that talent and experience, when shared increase in quantity and improve in quality. Hence the last moral in this context :

‘If nobody responds to your call,  
Keep marching alone on your path of duty.  
Your own people may ridicule you.  
Do not worry about that’.

Remember that the scientific age would not have set in, if a few fearless research workers had not braved the wrath of Roman Catholic Church and consequent ridicule by the mob. Stick to your tryst with destiny with faith and hope for imparting glory to human life.

••••

### III

## Human Glory and Degradation

Air exists, but it cannot be seen; fire and water are visible, but neither has definite shape; a boulder or clod has shape, but both are lifeless; plants have life but being rooted to the ground cannot move from place to place; beasts can roam about and birds can fly, but their brains are not adequately developed. It is only man who combines all these characteristics in him and therein lies his glory. Degradation creeps in when he feels tempted to make an improper use of his talents – physical, emotional, intellectual and aesthetic.

### Greatness Versus Degradation

Noble minds have condemned anger, greed, excessive attachment to the material world, arrogance and lust as cardinal vices. They prescribe steadfastness, righteousness, mercy, co-operation, purity of conduct and restraint as dependable keys to a glorious life. The episode which took place between Alexander the Great and Diogenes, the recluse philosopher, illustrates these observations. While Alexander at the head of his army was marching from Macodonia to carry out his ambition of conquering the world, he happened to see Diogenes on a hillock, basking in the sun. Alexander felt curious to meet him for seeking his advice. As he moved up the hillock, he expected Diogenes to greet him with high-sounding felicitations due from a subject to his monarch. On

finding that Diogenes had not even stood up to welcome him, Alexander felt slighted and shrieked,

“Oh beggar! Don’t you know who I am ? I am Alexander, the Great on his march to vanquish the world.”

Diogenes said calmly “You are a slave of my slaves.”

Alexander’s temper cooled down and he besought,

“What makes you regard a king to be at the beck and call of your slaves, when I find none around you.”

Diogenes observed,

“Greed and anger are two of my slaves. They have cast their noose around you to drag you from land to land. They make you carry fire and sword for afflicting humanity with untold sufferings. Are you not thus, a puppet of these two slaves of mine ?”

Alexander was rendered speechless. He walked down the hillock, determined still to go ahead with his campaign. People like Alexander, Changez Khan, Napoleon, and Hitler, who are extolled as celebrities in the pages of history, in fact, were monsters who humiliated mankind with arson, plunder and mass rapes. Their greatness was, in fact, an abominable degradation.

### Degradation through Ignorance

Pity the Saracen general who made a devastating pronouncement about the central library at Alexandria, which was stocked even in the Middle ages with valuable works on astronomy, philosophy and literature. According to him, if the books contained knowledge which did not conform to the preachings of their own scripture, they were heretical, and if they held what their own faith prescribed, they were superfluous. He concluded that it would be an act of faith to burn the library. When ignorance gets reinforced by fanaticism, the degradation to which the human nature can drop is limitless.

## **Foul Use of Language**

The development of language has been regarded as a major step towards civilization. Knowledge and experience began to accumulate to benefit the generations, to come, as the phase of constant trial and error came to an end. Sociability and understanding among human beings for sharing one another's weal and woe, began to increase. But mark the degradation when language is used for telling a lie, for flattering others, for indulging in backbiting and for hurling abuses as well as biting taunts upon others. Man about whom, it is claimed that God created him in His Own Image, on such occasions, appears to be the basest species of the animal kingdom.

## **Palate as a Vice**

Eat to live, but live not to eat. But who cares to act on this golden adage. George Bernard Shaw aptly remarked 'Many people dig their graves with their teeth'. A doctor demonstrated the vice of gluttony and munching food, in and out of time, by asking his guests politely whether they would eat like animals or as human beings. The guests, in spite of their exasperation at the incivility of the host, assured to behave on the table like human beings. The doctor gasped in helplessness and asked if they really could. He reminded them that the animals eat only as much as they need, but the palate tempts human beings to keep gulping down food as if their stomachs are bags.

Palate and gluttony make the affluent forget their less fortunate fellow beings, who do not get sufficient to eat. Thus, many people face premature death either due to overeating or of starvation. This happens in our civilized world only, but in a jungle even a zebra knows that if the sides of a lion are full, the latter is not hungry and it is not going to have its next prey at least for the coming twenty four hours or so. The zebra will go on grazing even

as near as fifty feet from the lion, which is content to lie and loll after a full meal. Who can say this about the human beings ?

## **Debauchery**

Take the case of sex, which is not as regular a need of the body as food. Animals mate only when the females are in heat. But sex has become a debauchery with the so-called supreme creation of God. Professions like prostitution and the crimes like rape, peculiar to man only, make him appear as the most degraded animal. The vulgarity which the males of human species display at the sight of women, makes most of us feel that man may not be the descendant of apes as suggested by Darwin's Theory of Evolution, but a close kin of the donkey.

## **Curse of War**

A zoologist once made a fictitious protest very rightly on behalf of tiger that human beings brand him wrongly as ferocious and bloodthirsty. Never have the tigers in a jungle formed themselves into two rival groups from time to time under the banners of hostile armies for exterminating each other as human beings do. The curse of war is known to man only, but the other animal species, unsocial or gregarious are unaware of it.

## **Institution of Family**

The institution of family lent a lot of security and dignity to society. It assured protection to the wife and, in turn her devoted care of the husband, the affectionate bringing up of children and their supporting the parents in old age. The political ideologies, opposed to the family system, have not been able to harm it as

much as the greed, hypocrisy and selfishness of individual partners have eroded its utility and sanctity.

It is customary in India that a wife observes fast on a particular day once a year to pray for the long life of her husband. One such migrant to a European country on her polite refusal to share a cup of coffee with her colleagues on the day of her customary fast was not only laughed at by them, but she was advised to pray instead for his early death, so that she might get his property as well as the chance of an equally good remarriage.

A woman was seen fanning a grave. When the onlookers learnt that her late husband lay buried there, they praised her devotion to the late spouse. But she asserted that it was not so. Before his death he had wished that she should not remarry at least till his grave did not dry up and in deference to his last expectation from her, she was fanning the wet cement to dry at the earliest.

Without entering into the controversy whether the story is real or sheer fiction, we ought not ignore the evils like adultery, extortion of dowry with an equally cruel alternative of exterminating the bride and the manipulation of excuses for enforcing divorce. An unchaste wife or an adulterous husband seldom rear a happy family. The heated arguments between husband and wife after the late return of either from club or pub, keeping the children guessing whether their parents would forgive and forget each other by the morning or they would rush to court for legal separation, rings the knell of constructive purpose for which the institution of family had been established. The result is that in many a country on Sunday reunion of children and parents, a wife explains, thus, to her husband the cause of noise in the courtyard,

“Your children and my children are scrambling with our children”.

Premarital affairs have led to the growth of practice of live-in-couples, with no conjugal obligation, ending mostly in single-parenthood. Tilting during courtship or the wedlock ending in separation on the flimsy ground of incompatibility, is not an exception but has become an accepted social norm. Who suffers ?

The child, called by the unmarried mother ‘her love child’, but in fact ‘the deserted offspring’, exhibiting degrading parenthood.

## Filial Obligation

One of my colleagues, drawing handsome pay, got upset because his rich father, who was a little over sixty, was not likely to pass away in a year or so (though he had assured his would-be in-laws to the effect), for the old man had started going for long walks twice a day.

How degrading it sounds when a son quite indifferently calls his mother as a mere widow surviving his late father! How odd it looks when aged parents, suffering from consuming loneliness in old age homes, come to visit their married son only when invited ! The neo-middle class in India so often referred to their parents as servants of family looking after land in their native village, when the latter showed the audacity to come to see their urbanised offspring.

These stray musings extol the human glory where it exists so that the mind continues to be beautified.

If your conduct reflects beauty of mind  
Your body is a temple of love and grace  
Your actions serve as elevating precepts  
Impressing people with marvellous effect.

• • • •

## **Old Age**

Ripening age  
Led by restraint  
Reflects grace

## IV

### Old Age : Blessing or Suffering

Robert Browning (1812-89) hailed old age as :

‘— grow old along with me  
The best is yet to be  
The last of life for which the first was made’.

The approach to old age has been changing gradually thereafter in spite of the expanding network of facilities available in the form of medical services, recreational opportunities, communication channels, electrical gadgets attending to domestic chores, etc. The researchers observe often that the loneliness is saddening fast the old age. The sociologists attribute this phenomenon to the imminent replacement of value-based religion by value-immunised science and the growing dominance of utilitarian economics over the way of life, guided earlier by individual restraint and mutual co-operation.

### Lonesomeness

The malaise requires to be termed lonesomeness and not loneliness. Loneliness or seclusion is a subjective attitude, because many people shun company often due to inhibitions or other compulsions. Lonesomeness is a situation where individuals yearn for company but the opportunities for social interaction or diversion from routine are scarce. The feelings of lonesomeness leading to imaginary worries, continual grumbling thereat and consequent mental tension do not gnaw the aged alone. Eversince the joint family system started disintegrating and the importance

of planned families began to be impressed, children had been the most vulnerable section of society to feel the pinch of lonesomeness. With no grandparents to amuse them and the mother, in many a case, opting to be a career lady, the warmth of home and hearth has been getting chilly. Children are not brought up. They merely grow up with a lot of knowledge and a little experience. Work is not relished but suffered with an eye at the watch. Hence in many cases people feel bored, even when working in company with others. The advances in technology, with all the amenities in their wake, have led to a society, where the aged feel lonesome, children complain to be neglected, women grumble to have been burdened with extra work and men drown their boredom at pubs or clubs.

### A Fable about Old Age

Old age had its problems even in the so-called golden past. A fable describes the situation metaphorically. It is said that when God determined the span of life for various species, the Almighty, in His Wisdom allotted twenty five years to homo sapiens. Man protested that he had not been fairly treated. The donkey sympathising with man implored God to reduce its span by twenty five years and increase that of man correspondingly. The latter was not satisfied still. The dog offered a similar deduction to be made in its case as well in favour of man, which raised the duration of human life to seventy five years. Finding him still grumbling, the snake suggested that twenty five years be also taken from its life span for satisfying the human urge to live longer. After that God ignored further entreaties of man in this regard. It is jokingly said that the original allotment of twenty five years is the only part of life which homo sapiens enjoy as carefree childhood and adolescence, charmed with the wine of youth. For the next twenty five years he works like a donkey to provide for the family,

he rears. After fifty he resorts to barking at family members finding them not to be heeding to his patriarchal supervision. In the last years he feels so hapless and helpless that he sneaks to lonely places for avoiding his family members. In many a case the shunning is camouflaged under the garb of saintliness through renunciation.

### **Lopsided Research**

It is the basic flaw in contemporary research that social problems are not examined in their totality. The governmental system, providing opportunities to political parties for capturing seats of power through periodic elections, leads to finding expedient solutions to the growing social, economic and political maladies instead of pursuing long-ranged effective remedies.

If social values are not re-assessed periodically, they acquire roots as oppressive traditions. Hence constructive change is the basic need of mankind's march towards excellence. The stress is on 'constructive change', and not on 'change for the sake of change' based on findings on isolated issues.

When value-immunised science began to challenge religious beliefs which had been reduced to mere rituals with the passage of time, the ecclesiastical hold over the followers crumbled like a dilapidated structure. But, because science merely demolished the existing beliefs without suggesting alternatives, Matthew Arnold bemoaned that the old world was dead but the new one was yet to be born. In the vacuum, thus, caused utilitarian economics ushered in an era of consumerism which had been sharpening the craze of individuals to keep elevating the style of living, without making anyone realise as to what corresponding contribution each of them owes, for making the system uniformly fair and stable.

### **Blessing or a Curse**

It is not correct to project that old age alone is suffering under the changing circumstances. It is mostly the outcry of superannuated people who are always worried about the maintenance of standard of living which they had while in service. They hardly constitute two per cent of the total population, but are the most vocal section, because they have the forums to protest and the means to highlight their demands. As senior citizens they owe a lot of heart-searching. Society had been giving them a privileged place depending on their position. Why should they bother about their security alone? As senior citizens they have an obligation to find out as to how each of them, individually and collectively, can be of fruitful service to society. Lonesomeness may start disappearing thereafter, because social service fetches a lot of satisfaction and solace.

It is desirable that social organisations, educational institutions, political formations and judicial forums endeavour to ascertain as to how the varied and rich experience of senior citizens can be availed of for regulating the rat race for existence. Pity the nation that ignores its matured and seasoned segments which can be beneficial as well as beneficent, if properly harnessed. The senior citizens may also not indulge into self-pitying. They should offer themselves for voluntary social service depending on health.

### **The Second Childhood**

The grandparents, who can adjust themselves in a joint family, experience often the beginning of a second childhood.

Grandchildren feel at home with grandparents  
Caress their silvery hair with joy and love  
Thus, the infants and the old become playmates  
Old age may be the coming of second childhood.

## The Best Is Yet to Be

Those who are living alone, either by choice or due to the scattered placement of their career-seeking offspring, should tune themselves to the exhortation 'The best is yet to be'.

In the mellowed evening of one's life  
A gratifying phase of dedicated strife  
With children well-settled far and near  
Empty nest at peace, mind calm and clear  
Master of time to plan work or leisure  
No hurry; living with a placid measure  
The sole urge being to refine the self  
Without any craving for power or pelf  
The will to improve rejuvenates the zest  
With an added grit to excel in that quest.

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## V

### Ageing with Grace

Growing upto prime and then start ageing towards mortal end constitute the march of biological life. But human beings are peculiar among the zoological species, because,

they have a mind to feel as to what is good or bad,  
brain to think as to what is correct or incorrect,  
and to crown all,  
aesthetic sense to distinguish between beauty  
and ugliness.

For those, who develop these talents, life becomes an art, because they can formulate attitudes for getting better individually as well as collectively. The persons, who remain deficient in the growth of a balanced personality, lead life as a routine, regulated by traditional customs and beliefs.

### Divisions of Life

Span of life has two broad divisions, viz., functions of life and the art of life. The former include acquiring education, finding employment and rearing of a family. Period of life upto twenties is called heat due to enthusiasm bubbling from youthfulness and thereafter, upto fifty or so, it is considered as power, for it is directed to attaining, position and prestige. Ageing begins to show its symbols, if the life, henceforth, is to be led as an art; or its symptoms, if it is suffered as existence, after one enters fifties.

For discovering the glory of art of living, persons with attitudes, start preparing themselves for retirement or for entering the period of light, where base sentiments like envy and hate have no place and the lofty values like appreciation and co-operation become the way of life. Thus, an ageing person remains a cheerful young old man till his end.

### **Persons without Attitudes**

Persons without attitudes fall into four categories. First, who consider working as the sole purpose of life. They do not know mostly how to spend their earning for a better living. Being ignorant of the value of leisure, they succumb to overwork during the period of ageing or by the time they are to retire.

Second, who have not learnt to live within their means. Even after retirement their search for hired work continues. They do not collapse like the first category, but keep cringing for a few years more.

Third, who have a single track brain, retire with sufficient means, but do not know how to enjoy leisure, because they do not have any recreative hobby. They feel isolated and begin to wither.

Fourth, who retire at the prime of power and prestige, supported by perks, and are given to shouting at juniors to pass off accountability. They face a sudden vacuum, with none to run at their command and with no perks to keep their life comfortable. As they have not learnt the value of a smile and of self-possession, they start wilting.

For these categories, the first two years after retirement are a period of adjustment. As they lack such an attitude, majority of them pass away with an epitaph :

‘They worked and perished thereafter’.

### **Period of Light**

Now, about the remaining few who prepare themselves for leading post-retirement life as an art, that is those who manage to convert their heat and power into light. They are unlike the recluses of past, who resorted to renunciation for achieving salvation. This section of society, which retires from employment but does not retreat from the worldly scene, started evolving, when the world tended to gatecrash into modern age under the impact of progressive ideas and scientific discoveries. They understand that :

- (i) life on earth is not a punishment, but an achievement through evolution; and
- (ii) the ultimate aim of life is not to seek union with God, but to leave this world better than the one in which they have been born.

These two basic departures from the past beliefs hold firmly that the golden age is not behind but ahead of us and the world, purged of ignorance, want, squalor and disease will be a virtual heaven. The number of such persons, who manage to transform their heat and power into light is on gradual increase. They are not mere ‘senior citizens’, a lip courtesy shown to them, but ‘saner citizens’ who hold a hope for tomorrow.

### **All Is Not Lost**

Let us explore, whether those persons, who normally perish during the two fateful years following retirement, have any chance to escape the catastrophe and live, thereafter, with the grace, which adorns old age. Here are a few suggestions for them :

- (i) If you can not cheer anybody, make a determined effort to get rid of the harmful habit of jeering, nagging, snubbing and frowning. The latter indulgence not only adds to the number of foes, but also increases tension unnecessarily. Stop also whining about what you were denied in career making. Such a repining is a continuous self-inflicted torture. After the game has been played, forgetting and forgiving is an act of serenity.

- (ii) There is a bewitching as well as soothing charm in the life outside the one made cosy and protective by costly electrical gadgets and interior decoration. The lonesomeness or boredom to which you fall a prey so often can be kept off, if you learn to tune yourself to the music of life i.e. watching from a corner children at play, strolling in the blooming parks, and observing change of seasons, grandeur of setting sun or of a moon-lit night. Self-imposed isolation leads to decay whereas appreciation of natural beauty often helps a withered mind to blossom.
- (iii) Do not be tempted to nibble every now and then. In a developing society, a few die of starvation but many dig their graves with their teeth. Judicious control over tongue, whether it is palate or prattle, is a bliss-giving act.
- (iv) Make your spouse, if she is a housewife, feel that she too shares the leisure offered by retirement. A person can ward off the nagging feeling of old age, if he gives up the keenness to enquire 'What has she cooked ?' and learns instead to appreciate 'How delightful she looks !'. This attitude is worth developing, because most of the aged parents have to live alone, with their offspring gone away in search of careers.
- (v) The gnawing feeling that company of the old is shunned, their counsel ignored and their existence overlooked is an invitation to gloom. Self-pity is suicidal.
- (vi) Do not forget to send birthday and marriage anniversary greetings to dear and near ones. These are quite inexpensive gifts, but valuable in effect which keep the members of a family, even though living apart or afar, emotionally tied with each other.

The observance of these tips may impart amiability to behaviour, tranquillity to mind and clarity to thinking.

## The Light

Those, who have learnt the art of leading retired life, become living models of such precepts as :

'Cleanliness is complementary to godliness'.

'Love is the most efficacious remedy for every emotional malady'.

'Smile costs little but gladdens all'.

'Truth is great, but truthful living is self-rewarding'.

'Knowledge acquires depth and experience increases in worth, if shared'.

They thus, lead others with the kindly light, they emit.

## Hope for Posterity

What hope do they hold for posterity ? The number of senior citizens is steadily increasing. In developing countries they constitute seven to ten per cent of the electorate. If this sizeable section of electors who are,

not tempted by material offers;

not deterred by muscle power;

not cajoled by self-seekers however, mighty,

and

not swayed by slogans

exercise their franchise with their commitment to dignity of an individual, social justice for all, and the global peace, they are destined to improve the quality of elected governments.

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## **Resurgence**

Where present is boldly faced and shaped  
Past is not pursued, bewitched by myths  
And the mirage of future leads not astray  
Such an approach reflects meaningful quest.

## VI

### Creating a Scientific Temper

A bulk of Indian people, due to their being illiterate, believe in myths and superstitions. The educated few are no better. It is a popular joke that an average science teacher in India tells his class that the sun is not a god, but a star made entirely of inorganic matter, but at home he offers water daily to the rising sun and goes also for a dip in a holy tank or river at a place of pilgrimage on the day of solar eclipse. Unless the way of thinking of people in India is rationalised, social and economic progress in India will be inadequate.

### The Renaissance

The modern age having set in, a few scientists in Europe, neither caring for the wrath of Papal Court nor for the ridicule hurled at them by the ignorant, said boldly that earth was not the centre of universe and man too was not a fallen angel. One independent observation led to another till the Dark Age in Europe ended and the Renaissance dawned. One technical writer has stated that, according to anthropologists, man had been inhabiting the globe for the last 500,000 years; for 475,000 years, he lived in the caves and jungles like wild animals. Agriculture was adopted, as a way of life, about 25,000 years ago. Science, as an endeavour to ascertain knowledge, based on observations and inferences, started during the fifteenth century. During the last 200 years, the application of scientific point of view brought about the industrial revolution.

How slow and tedious was the march from cave to the plough! The change from primitive agriculture to the age of technology was comparatively quick, but the entry into space age under the impact of scientific knowledge is almost like an event getting accomplished literally in the twinkling of an eye. This works out as 0.0001% of the total period of existence of homo sapiens on earth.

Professor J.B.S. Haldane stresses the significance of scientific point of view in the 'The Inequality of Man' as :

‘...It can gradually spread among humanity as a whole the point of view that prevails among research workers and has enabled a few thousand men and a few dozen women to create the science on which modern civilization rests. For if we are to control our own and one another’s actions, as we are learning to control nature, the scientific point of view must come out of the laboratory and be applied to the events of daily life’.

When both these observations are put together, it looks like a miracle that the scientific way of working on the part of a few thousand researchers, who hardly constituted 0.0001% of the average world population during the last two centuries, changed the face of world beyond recognition. How inconceivable the transformation shall be, if all human beings develop scientific temper !

### Change Needed in Thinking

We, in India, need this change intensively in our way of looking at nature as well as at life itself. Legislative measures, no doubt, aim at reforms, but they begin to show results slowly, at least after a generation. An illustration is provided by the phenomenon of green revolution in India. It came in those states, where the agrarian reforms, like the abolition of landlordism, had

not been called for, but instead the new techniques of agricultural operations were extended to farmers. What the legislative actions could not achieve after twenty years of independence upto 1967, the agricultural universities accomplished within five years of their inception.

Economists have been describing India as a rich country inhabited by the poor. The statement implies that in spite of her enviable natural wealth and vast human resources, India is among the poorest countries of the world, because her people, being illiterate, ignorant and superstitious, lack the technical skill for making full use of their natural wealth.

Why did not the scientific way of thinking and its resultant gain, the technical skill, develop in India ? One has not to go far to ascertain the reason. Our past is responsible for this state of affairs. The Aryans migrated to India from Central Asia, driven by heat, thirst and drought. On entering the Punjab, they observed an altogether different aspect of nature. It was no longer a cruel force, the enemy of man, but a source of beneficence with its green forests and network of rivers. Since then the attitude of an average Indian had been to adore nature as a goddess and to worship the sun, the moon, the mountains, the rivers, etc. No effort was made to discover about the working of forces of nature. Its benefits were gratefully accepted as boons and the occasional destruction which got caused through floods, storms, drought, etc. was attributed to the wrath of natural elements, sought to be appeased through rituals. This had not been a rational attitude and the Indians continued to regard themselves helpless before nature.

### **India and the West**

Life in the Western countries had been a constant struggle against vagaries of nature like fog and blizzards. Hence, people there had not been looking upon nature as a goddess. A short-lived change in their outlook came during nineteenth century after Rousseau espoused his political views by giving

the call 'Back to Nature'. But that inclination, at the most, resulted in the growth of romantic traditions in literature. Even the poetic works of Wordsworth, who had been an ardent votary of nature, lost their appeal when the botanists on dissecting it, found it soulless. Darwin's Theory, proclaiming survival of the fittest in the domain of nature appeared quite realistic to the Western people. Because they had been looking upon nature as a group of elements mostly hostile towards man, they developed the qualities of adventure to overcome it. It was quite unlike Indians, who worshipped or appeased nature. In Europe, people of old Greece and Rome had a similar attitude. In the Mediterranean countries, the climate remains mostly temperate. Hence, like Aryans, the ancient Greeks as well as Romans worshipped nature and believed in myths. But after Aristotle, the critical approach started influencing their way of thinking.

### **Harmful Effect of Caste System**

The adoption of caste system by Aryans resulted in making education the monopoly of brahmins, who did no physical work but lived on offerings. When education and manual work get detached, scientific knowledge and technical skill do not develop. As the pedagogues and priests gloated on devotional charity, their knowledge no longer remained worldly in its approach, but tended to become metaphysical and speculative. Life on the earth began to be regarded as unreal and the emphasis shifted to life in heaven after death. Worldly progress and prosperity were derided as attachment and considered to be standing in the way of achieving salvation.

The simple and frugal modes of living, to the extent of poverty, were accepted as norms of piety. The supremacy attached to birth in preference to worth made our people further idle and fatalist. As the political system concentrating power of statecraft in the hands of one caste i.e. the kshatriyas, did not extend equality to the remaining castes, nationalism, which is a

by-product of a system recognising the rightful claims of all citizens did not develop in India.

Our old social system was not only based on inequality, but within the castes demanded also absolute obedience to the elder and superior. It was enjoined upon a pupil to accept as truth what his teacher taught, and the reverence for authority didn't allow his critical faculty to develop. Moreover, stress had been on learning by rote which weakened the ability to observe and evaluate facts.

Even now a few protagonists of old Indian culture propagate that the golden age is behind us and not before us. Our past has heritage of wicked caste discriminations, mass illiteracy, absolute monarchy, poverty, glorified with the assurance of heaven in the next world, and all round inequality, weeding out every possible impulse of nationalism; whereas the present democratic set-up assures social equality, dignity of individual and economic justice. The advent of golden age may be expedited by adopting scientific way of thinking and by re-evaluating old values in the light thereof. But the caution may not be overlooked in the zeal, that reason bereft of morals produces intelligent criminals.

## India and China

India and China achieved independence in the late forties of last century; the former after suffering exploitation by a foreign rule as well as from the pangs of partition and the latter after going through the travails of civil war. Nature is not as beneficent to China as it is to India. The observation requires no facts to substantiate it, as not only the land almost all over India is suitable for agriculture, but the weather too remains favourable by and large throughout the year. A greater part of territory in China is submontane and remains exposed also to frequent vagaries of nature. In 1954, China claimed that she had achieved self-sufficiency in food. That declaration took India by surprise, but the West scoffed at it as a piece of political propaganda. A team of Indian scientists that visited China for

ascertaining the validity of that declaration, on return made the following valuable observations :

- (i) An average Chinese, unlike an Indian, regards life on earth as real and is not swayed by the expectation of heaven after death. He works hard to live well, whereas people in India are idle fatalists, content with poverty. The teachings of Confucius\* left a very beneficial effect on the Chinese society.
- (ii) The Chinese society had been free from castes. Recognition is attached there to worth, and the birth in a high family carried no privileges even before the advent of prevailing political system. Everyone has to work and the side tasks like poultry, piggery, fishery, etc. are not looked upon as inferior jobs, which in India are the professions considered to be meant for lower castes only. The multi-purpose farming keeps the peasants busy as well as brings, in return, a better standard of living.

Perhaps the greater progress in China is not due to the difference in political systems, but is the reward of their rational approach to life.

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\* Chinese scholar, contemporary of Lord Buddha, who put forth a philosophy of life based on hard work, co-operation, courtesy, refined entertainment and the referring of all disputes to arbitration rather than settling them through force.

## VII

### Rationalising the Old Values

The impact of scientific thought on various branches of knowledge and modes of life calls for that our old beliefs and values be re-assessed in the light, thereof, for securing the emanating social and economic gains. Three major precepts and the related practices, to which all the lapses, rather misfortunes of our past can be ascribed are; the caste system, sentimental views about a few cattle, and the obligation to the producing of a male child.

#### Background of Caste System

Subsequent to their migration to India, the *Aryans* kept facing continual resistance from the natives. They had hitherto been leading a nomadic life with shepherding as their principal occupation. On entering India, they were gladdened to find perennial rivers and plains covered with rich growth of vegetation. There was no longer any need of roaming in search of water and grass. They could easily switch on to the vocation of natives i.e. agriculture, which was not only lucrative but provided also stable life at one place.

As they had not yet developed a strong hold over the new land, they needed a standing army to keep the hostile natives pushed back. Hence out of sheer expediency, they organised themselves into four categories according to the aptitude and intelligence of their male members. The learned among them were entrusted with the premier task of education; the physically strong were enjoined to assume the onerous jobs of warfare and tribal management, while all others were mobilised to undertake

agriculture, artisanal activities, trade and allied vocations. The captives were conscripted for menial jobs. If the classification had kept itself based on worth, it would have been in the best interest of society, because merit is the criterion, observed by every progressive organisation for entrusting responsibilities.

#### Myth and Concomitant Misfortune

It was the beginning of our misfortunes when the job-orientated categorisation was replaced though a myth for assigning position in society on the basis of birth in supercession to that of worth. It was propounded by the well-entrenched preceptors that they appeared from the mouth of Brahma, the god of creation. They exalted themselves as 'brahmins', i.e. to the top rung of social set-up. The warriors and administrators were stated to have emerged from the arms of god and were complimented as protectors, 'khastriyas', they could be educated but not become educators. The working classes were proclaimed to have come out of the thighs of Brahma. They were termed as 'vaishas' and denied any possible access to education. The cross-bred and the captives, condemned to have been poured out by god through urine, were despised as 'shudras' and were assigned the menial jobs.

How monstrous that the status in society was determined according to vertical position of the limb from which the respective class was stated to have emerged! Each class, thereafter, was to be recognised as a birth-based 'caste'.

The theory of transmigration of soul, describing the next birth as punishment or reward for misdeeds or virtuous actions of the preceding life, made the privileges of higher castes unassailable, but sapped the initiative of the low-born for improving their lot. The brahmins began to brand themselves as touch-me-nots. The proud khastriya bowed before the brahmins but regarded himself superior to vaishas. The shudras, untouchables, were shunned by everybody. A society denying equality to its members fails to forge itself into a nation. Rather pride of birth and the caste

superiorities keep such people segregated into clans. Patriotism is always inspired by the recognition which society extends to its members. Our old history may have epics of individual valour, but words like nationalism and team-spirit had been unknown to it. We could not evolve a national flag symbolising the oneness of our people. Whosoever invaded us found the victory waiting for him, because we had been more of a crowd than a nation.

As the brahmins had not to earn their livelihood, they perpetuated their hold by floating superstitions and meaningless rituals. The exclusive right of khastriyas to political power did not let the democratic outlook and traditions develop in our country. Monarchy continued to hold its undiminished sway in statecraft. As the working classes were denied any access to education, they got gradually pushed into superstitious darkness. The metaphysical belief of real life beginning after death kept them content with poverty and blissful in their ignorance.

### **A Ray of Hope**

The only movement which sought to evolve a humane outlook in India was the foundation of Sikhism, but its influence remained confined to Punjab. The growth of nationalism in India is, by and large, due to the influence of West. No doubt, we were exploited a lot by our British rulers, but we learnt a few good things from them also. The latter include sense of nationalism, preference for a democratic set-up and the scientific way of thinking.

It was a landmark in our history, when the Constituent Assembly decided to abolish untouchability for restoring equality, social and political, to our people. For the first time we adopted a national flag symbolizing our traditions and aspirations. As a nation, we are hardly in our sixties. We have yet to discard many drawbacks imbibed through subjugation spread over many centuries. We are likely to commit many mistakes, but the evil of casteism stands challenged, though woefully, effective follow-up action is pursued half-heartedly. All political parties care more for next elections and

not for future generations. It is harmful to keep extending reservations on the basis of birth after every ten years as a constitutional ritual. It is legally improper too to continue to call the citizens born after independence to be still belonging to scheduled categories. Instead of declaring a collective clan or community as a backward class prior to each general election, the reservation be allowed for individual economic backwardness only, for eradicating the seeds of casteism.

The advent of Aryan nomads into India turned out to be vandalism against native civilization based on agriculture and urbanised commerce. Whereas the intruders switched on to agriculture, they pushed back the natives to forests compelling them to go two steps backward, i.e., from agriculturists, not to shepherds even, but to hunters. They are the present day scheduled tribes.

### **Sentimentality about Cattle**

The sentimental views about certain animals need urgent re-assessment. When Aryans switched on to agriculture from shepherding, cow had to be preserved for successful operation of that new profession. The domesticated animals, at that time, were horses, cows and the dogs. Horses could not be spared as draught power for agriculture, because due to their speed and intelligence, they were more useful in warfare. Dogs could not be harnessed to plough the fields. The choice naturally fell on oxen. It was again a source of another misfortune, when cow was declared sacred in scriptures, so that bovine cattle could be preserved for use in agricultural pursuits. It is wrong to regard any person or cattle holier and higher than the country, where we live. The invaders from North -West happened to discover our superstitious regard for cow. They conveniently marched into India, driving a bovine herd before them, as they knew that no Hindu soldier would discharge even an arrow towards them fearing harm to the sacred animal. Such a bloodless conquest is unheard. The course of history changed and a period of subjugation set in. When a few centuries later the English came to

India, they also found out that the *Hindus* worship cow, but the *Muslims* slaughter it. They had been cleverly making us fight over cow and comfortably ruling over us by, thus, dividing us.

Now, when the political freedom has been achieved and we are making bold strides for economic progress, our sentimental views about the cow so often derail our plans. Bovine herds are the only stray cattle found in the countryside as well as in cities. They destroy the crops, spoil civic sanitation and pose traffic perils. Tourists make fun of such ludicrous scenes. Common sense demands that cattle be reared for three purposes only; milk, flesh and draught power.

A few among us are sentimental about monkeys as well. They are regarded the descendants of Hanuman, a monkey hero, who helped Lord Rama in his war against the demon king, Ravana. Human evolution from apes having been established scientifically, the superstitious belief about the sanctity of monkeys should also disappear. If our horticulture is to develop, let us decide once for all, as a Governor of Punjab asked a deputation of orthodox Hindus, who waited upon him to express their resentment against the campaign of extermination of monkeys launched by the state government, "Who has a prior right to live, monkey or the man" ? Certainly the superior species.

The Muslims are very touchy about pig. They do not adore rather abhor it. Pigs breed very fast and hold an equal threat to agriculture, sanitation and road traffic. Piggery, if adopted as a profession, may become a lucrative export industry.

Dog has also been sanctified in our epics, due to its age-old association with man. For shepherds, it is an indispensable friend, and, for hunters it is an invaluable help. But when a species overgrows its number, it creates an imbalance in the economy of nature. Like pigs, dogs also breed very fast. In India, the second great nuisance is caused by stray dogs. Not only they spoil the sanitation of our streets, but their incessant barking during night is also detrimental to public health. A very large number of them, every now and then, get rabid and prove very dangerous to public safety. It will be a great national service, if all stray dogs are exterminated.

## Menace of Population Explosion

The problem of over-population is also a source of alarm. Our old beliefs about producing children need revision according to the pace of time. When Aryans migrated to India, there was a great strain on their male population, due to stiff resistance offered by the natives. The old tribes assimilated the women abducted from other clans, but were not prepared to absorb, as equals, the males coming from other sections. For increasing the male population, it was laid as a religious obligation for every Hindu youngman to marry and produce a male child. The scriptures prescribe that it is the sacred duty of a Hindu to marry and produce a son. As long as a son is not born, he does not discharge his debt towards his ancestors and their souls suffer from thirst in heaven. When a son is born, the continuity in his lineage gets established, making him, thus, immortal.

## Myth of Heaven Shattered

The scanning of space has shattered the belief about heaven, and the modern economic thought holds that heaven on earth is better than heaven after death. In a vain hope of saving our souls from thirst in an imaginary heaven, let us not choose to lead lives of poverty, starvation and squalor through over-population on this real earth.

The evil corollaries of this superstitious belief like polygamy and early marriage have already been legally banned. But a lot of effort is needed still to persuade our people that a female child is as good as a male one. We must learn the advantage of a planned family. The days are gone, when it was proudly proclaimed 'the more the merrier'. Let us be very clear about the size of a family. Perhaps it will be in the best interest of country and to our greatest advantage also, if we observe it as a rule, that a family with one child is ideal, with two respectable, with three a crowd, and with four or more a yelling mob. Neither the marriages are made in heaven, nor every birth is inevitable. Both can be properly planned. The children are not the gift of nature, but the product of our physical desires and social aspirations.

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## VIII

### Appraisal of Heritage

Population of a country, referred to as human resource these days, has to be controlled in number as well as transformed in qualitative worth. Improving of quality calls for the appraisal of its heritage as reflected by popular epics, folk lore and mythological fables. As people regard the sages and heroes projected through them as their models, their concept of virtue or vice and right or wrong gets influenced accordingly.

Our principal epics were screened on television recently. Some of the observations made subsequently by the viewers, hailing from younger generation, were that :

- (i) sages of the past, without ascertaining about a situation fully, had been given to cursing rashly the persons who earned their uncalled for wrath;
- (ii) blind obedience to elders, so often neither in the interest of society nor consistent with accepted norms, had been adored as a virtue;
- (iii) sustaining or fulfilling a personal pledge, even though it was harmful for general good, had been regarded chivalrous ;
- (iv) certain petty incidents, which could have been overlooked with a sense of humour, led to catastrophic results; and
- (v) there had been different yardsticks for assessing the conduct of men and women.

All the aforesaid remarks seem to be relevant.

A person who considers cursing as his prerogative, acquires simultaneously the role of an accuser as well as that of verdict-giver. A system which denies to an alleged defaulter the opportunity to explain his action, before being declared guilty, is suffocating and terrifying in its effect.

Blind obedience not only perpetuates a set-up granting arbitrary power to the high-ups, but also makes the masses mutely submissive.

Glorification of the fulfilment of an undue pledge by a well-placed person, contravening established norms, gives rise to a despotic structure in which needs and aspirations of deserving sections of society get usurped.

Sense of humour reflects mental alertness and emotional maturity. People lacking this trait remain petty-minded, quarrelsome and egoistic.

A society prescribing a discriminating code for women remains retrogressive. The imposition of husband as a temporal god for his wife and the customs like sati (burning alive of the widow with dead body of her husband) and the prohibition of re-marriage to even a child widow could not be sanctioned by any just and humane norm.

Generations, fed successively on such beliefs, constitute a superstitious, intolerant, insensitive and backward populace, which the Indian society, still, predominantly is.

The folk tales which have been narrated by elders to children since the hoary past have two themes in common, viz., a youngman, cornered by poverty leaves his home and finds both bride and wealth all of a sudden. It is often a princess falling in love with him at first sight or a cobra, guarding a treasure, making a gift thereof to him. Such lore bears out that the society from which it emanates lacks enterprise and is fatalist.

In our mythological legends, the worshipper mostly seeks an unnatural blessing, such as sway over death for personal aggrandisement. The deity who bestows such a boon, so often is either likely to fall himself a victim to that granted wish or the other deities have to find out expedient measures to deprive the votary of the advantage of that unnatural blessing, because the blessed invariably turns out to be a tyrant. Such myths lend support to despotic regimes and do not encourage democratic aspirations, because the power to depose a despot is not shown to be lying with people but with a supernatural force.

The Constitution of India declares that she is a sovereign, socialist, secular democratic republic, which recognizes dignity of individual and assures to one and all justice – social, political and economic. These aspirations are alien to our heritage passed on to us through our epics, folk lore and myths. Hence, either a complete break with such a heritage is called for or its logical appraisal is enjoined for our socio-economic regeneration. As masses cannot be torn in totality from their past, re-evaluation of old beliefs and customs is imperative, in case, Indian society is to compete with other nations who have acquired progressive outlook.

Medieval Europe gatecrashed into modern age after the prevailing dogmas and values began to be challenged and modified by researchers like Copernicus, Sigmund Freud and Charles Darwin. It is a tribute to the awakening created by those dauntless intellectuals and the tolerance imbibed by people under their influence that the Biblical Story of Creation was given up in favour of the Theory of Evolution. When the human brain and mind get released from taboos, an era of unprecedented awakening sets in. We need a similar initiative for awakening our society, in the absence of which, new mythological deities and heroes will continue to be created by sycophants;

achievement of freedom from foreign rule is being presented as a gift from imperialism by our research institutions — no better than intellectual slums

and

the black money has become a destructive deity which can make or mar a political set-up.

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## IX

### National Service and the Youth

The word ‘service’ when used in the context of an era of technology in which we live, means a skilled job done by a person trained for the purpose and differs substantially from its traditional meaning, ‘work done by a domestic servant’. Its scope excludes also charity projects run by well-entrenched persons or organisations. Service has come to mean the hired work done by a professional to the best of his ability, neither as a hobby nor as an act aspiring to seek publicity, but for helping those who seek it. When service gets qualified as ‘national’ the phrase means ‘work of specialized nature, done for the greater good of the largest number without any consideration’.

The second constituent of the topic is ‘youth’. It is desirable to understand clearly as to what a rare commodity the resource ‘youth’ is. John Milton (1606–74), a celebrated English poet, observed that wealth of a nation does not merely lie in its lofty mountains, fertile plains, dense forests, mighty rivers and the vast seas, but consists of dedicated youth, physically strong, morally sound and mentally bright, who can defend these natural resources and harness them for national progress and prosperity.

### National Service in a Welfare State

The Constitution of India envisages a welfare state; a political system under which it is obligatory for the government to work for betterment of masses for securing their basic needs and elementary amenities of life. The living necessities are no longer confined to meals, clothes and the roofed accommodation but include

balanced diet, requisite clothing depending on climate, sanitary living conditions, education, medical care, recreation and the assistance during want. According to a survey conducted by the UNESCO soon after its inception, the minimum standard of living and the recreational facilities which should be available in a developing country are :

- (a) balanced diet having a caloric value of about 3000 units for every adult; thirty yards of cloth per head per year; housing space of at least 100 square feet per capita; and the provision of medical aid on the basis of one service centre for every 10,000 residents;
- (b) 100 newspapers, 50 radio sets and 20 cinema seats for every 1000 people.

The expanding television network during the last few decades in India has been able to cater to the recreational requirements to a great extent, but voluntary national service can complement the government efforts in spreading literacy, creating health consciousness and mustering assistance during want.

### **Our Resources and the Challenge**

In the natural resources India, perhaps, is next to none. We have the highest mountain of the world in our north with its long and wide ranges abounding in wealth. It has the distinction to be the only country in the world to be associated with the name of an ocean. We have confluent rivers with a sufficient flow throughout the year. The alluvial plains and mineral wealth are in abundance. To crown all, India possesses one-third of the technical and scientific personnel of the world.

The greatest national service, which the youth can render, is to make a proper use of its resources; remove those harmful notions that make people lethargic or feel content with poverty and above all to eliminate the anti-social elements, robbing the nation through the evils of adulteration, hoarding, smuggling, black-marketing and other deceitful means.

### **Concept of National Service before Independence**

When we had been struggling for achievement of independence, the motherland demanded supreme sacrifices for shattering the fetters of slavery. Munshi Prem Chand (1891-1936) depicted beautifully this sentiment in one of his short stories. A damsel agreed to accept the proposal of a suitor on the condition that he presented to her the most precious gift, which the world could offer. She declined to receive a tear shed by a youngman, awaiting his execution at the gallows on the charge of having committed a heinous crime, when he happened to see an innocent infant, like whom he had been before getting addicted to a life of crime; the tear depicted his repentance and remorse. She also did not accept a pinch of ash brought by the lover from a pyre, where a wife, in the bloom of her youth, burnt herself with the dead body of her husband, a remnant of supreme sacrifice of conjugal love. But she rushed to kiss a handful of blood-stained dust brought by him from a battlefield where a youngman fell fighting for the defence of his country, sacred dust of motherland made richer by the sweet wine of youth.

This had been the concept of national service in the earlier half of last century and Munshi Prem Chand wrote this story, inspired by the last words of Kartar Singh Sarabha (1896- 1915), a martyr who kissed gallows in his teens :

‘...If I had more lives than one, it would have been a great honour to me to sacrifice each of them for my country’.

### **Rational Way of Thinking**

Let us take some of the problems, where national service by the youth can be helpful. Poverty is neither God-made nor a sure passport to heaven as many orthodox people believe. To live content with poverty in a world of plentiful resources is a sacrilegious act. Hence the attitude towards poverty seeks

immediate revision. Likewise the belief that certain diseases can be warded off by appeasing particular deities is suicidal. Our backwardness had been speaking for itself, when we were found worshipping moon during the week, the American astronauts landed on it. The rational evaluating of our social and cultural values through precept and practice constitutes valuable national service by the youth.

### **Social Sense**

The enlightened people in the past had been striving for individual salvation. They felt concerned more about the life after death than the one on earth. The worldly attitudes were shunned fearing that they might invite temptations and, thus, impede salvation. Everybody kept caring for himself and the social sense did not develop in India of yore. Sermons like :

‘Oh Kabir, your hut is near that of cut-throats  
Those who indulge into misdeeds  
Shall have to account for themselves  
You need not feel gloomy and concerned’,

have been preaching sheer escapism. The anti-social elements are not to be punished by God, but are to be reformed or curbed by society itself. This may be possible if we develop social sense in preference to personal considerations. The example of American reformer Nadar or that of Indian actor-cum-producer, Manoj in exposing the anti-social elements is an enviable act of national service. The growing lawlessness in industrial towns and the dismal law and order situation even in many developed countries are due to the indifference towards this social obligation. It has been observed that the police alone cannot curb the growing crime. The youth be induced to display social sense by coming out boldly for keeping a check on anti-social elements.

### **Civil Sense**

A nation does not always expect heroic deeds from its youth. Opportunities for displaying exceptional heroism come rarely in life. Ordinary personal habits and actions like truthful conduct, fearless behaviour, devotion to duty, politeness, observance of principles of hygiene, respect for law, etc. make people orderly and methodical. Such a personal discipline is called civic sense and is an unfailing instrument of national service.

### **Birkenhead Drill**

Birkenhead Drill should be kept in mind during an emergency. Birkenhead was a British ship, which caught fire in 1853 while returning from Australia. It had about 1000 passengers on board. Its captain was able to save all, except five, by laying down the principle that those who were born later had a right to die later, and the physically weak i.e. women and children had a prior claim to safety boats than men. The normal rule ‘first come, first served’ should not be observed literally. Children, women and the old should be extended all possible affection, courtesy and respect. The adoption of such considerations is an act of commendable national service.

### **Individual Adventure**

You should proceed determinedly according to your objective belief. Your initiative is bound to inspire others. Goethe said wisely that if every body sweeps before his gate, the world shall look clean. It is likely that some associates may ridicule your sense of service. A reformer is seldom popular. The greatest quality of a social worker is his faith in self, which inspires collective action.

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## **Glimpses from Personal Life**

I am man, for whom knowledge is not forbidden  
But who soars in space to explore its horizons

## Childhood Influences and Thereafter

Though I have not read many books, yet people on getting acquainted with me often compliment me as a knowledgeable person. Neither my family had any literary background nor the rural schools where I studied possessed the library facilities. Roaming preachers (*katha vachaks*) and theatre parties (*natak mandalies*) provided recreation as well as moral instructions. I recollect one such quatrain recited by a preacher :

‘He who never errs is God, merciful and omniscient  
He who realises his error is a self-improving person  
He who overlooks his error is no better than a beast  
He who flaunts his error is an incorrigible rogue’.<sup>1</sup>

This was a transforming revelation, altogether different from the sermons given at the congregations that omissions and commissions did not get pardoned in the ultimate reckoning.

Urdu used to be the medium of instruction then in all the aided schools. The teacher would conduct weekly poetical symposiums. A student was asked to initiate it by reciting any couplet. Then another would be called upon to present the couplet, first word of which began with alphabetical letter with which the previous one had concluded. This exercise necessitated extensive reading of poems included in the text-books, sharpened memorising and improved presentation skill.

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1. *Jo ghalti kabhi nahin karta woh sirf Bhagwan hai  
Jo ghalti kar sambhal jaya woh sudhar raha insan hai  
Jo ghalti karke na samjhay woh nira haiwan hai  
Jo ghalti karke jai akadar woh pucca shaitan hai.*

Two couplets which became my guiding stars were :

‘He who develops no intelligence despite vast learning  
Zafar, I regard such a person as a mere beast of burden’<sup>2</sup>

and

‘Hosts of hermits retreat to the forests to meditate.

But for me he is godly who cares for fellow beings’.<sup>3</sup>

The lessons which I gathered from these assemblies were :

- (i) the urge to improve through experience-based knowledge;
- (ii) the resolve not to accept any precept blindly; and
- (iii) the belief that service of mankind is the best mode of worship.

In spite of my brilliant performance in the matriculation examination, being among the few students who opted to offer papers in history and geography in English, my stepmother did not favour my higher education. She insisted instead that I should attend to farming. Disgusted with the strained situation, I left the village after more than two years and secured admission to a college.

I happened to glance at the book *Hints for Self-Culture* by L. Hardy in the college library. It was not the title but his portrait on the jacket which fascinated me. The unassuming appearance illustrated the saying ‘simple living and high thinking’. The reading of the very first page impressing the development of balanced personality comprising physical fitness, intellectual growth, moral steadfastness and aesthetical outlook enthused me to become an all-round student.

I could not pursue a planned educational career. History was my favourite subject. Law was my ambition. Mathematics served as my guardian for it offered a wide field for tuitions to

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2. *Na ho feham jisko kitabon se lada phirta  
Zafar, ham aisay insaan ko tassawar baail karte hain.*  
3. *Khuda ke ashiq to hain hazaron, banon mai phirte hain maray maray  
Mein uska banda banoon ga, jis ko khuda ke bandon se piar hoga.*

enable me to carry on as a self-supporting student. But English happened to be the only subject in which I could get Master's degree even with irregular attendance. The participation in freedom struggle diverted greater part of my attention to non-academic pursuits. The proficiency in English which I had developed proved an asset.

The sonnets by Rupert Brooke paying tribute to the English soldiers who laid down their lives during the First World War, included in the text-books for B.A in those days, prompted me to describe the valorous deeds of martyrs of freedom struggle in a similar vein.

I was arrested for leading the Save-INA campaign and was lodged in the Central Jail, Lahore. With the courtesy of R.B. Beni Chand Katoch, the Jail Superintendent, I was allowed to move freely in the precincts. Just as Byron was moved to see the dungeons of Chillon, I got stirred likewise on being shown the cells where Kartar Singh Sarabha and his associates had been tortured. I uttered spontaneously :

‘Sarabha, you come as a meteor to show us light’.

On seeing the scaffold where Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev had been executed, I exclaimed :

‘Bhagat Singh, you kissed the gallows in your prime’.

Such expressions kept buzzing in my mind. Partition of India with its concomitant dislocation and indignities, left an indelible mark on my mind. My feelings erupted when the Pakistani military junta committed similar atrocities in the then East Pakistan. ‘The Wail of a Bangle Girl’ was my first poem, followed by the books *Aspirations*, *Yearnings* and *Expectations*, widely anthologised and extensively reviewed.

The exposing of myths, incorporated in the history of freedom struggle, and the propagation of lofty ideals for which our martyrs laid down their lives is my major pursuit these days.

## XI

### Secrets of Longevity

I entered the 82nd year last November. In spite of declining physical energy, the natural process of ageing, I am retaining, rather improving, my mental energy and emotional steadfastness. I have been approached to share the secrets of longevity and the consequent unabated interest in academic pursuits. I would not call these as secrets, because secrets are concealed and not revealed. I call my way of life in this context, as the attitudes, I have developed.

Normally, regular physical exercise, methodical work culture and the preventive restraint in food habits are considered as attributes of healthy living. They are mere complementary factors. Each individual has his own experience in this respect to share. Biologically I have been the penultimate offspring of healthy and handsome parents. Hence despite the passing away of my mother, while I was not even eight, which demise inflicted ignored bringing up, I started life as a sturdy lad.

As I had to earn to learn, I considered no honest toil to be below dignity. While as a student at Khalsa College, Amritsar, after practicals in science subjects, strenuous study hours extending over eight periods, I walked a long distance to the city bothways for giving tuition, meagre emoluments from which sustained my living. Those long walks dispensed with the requirement of regular physical exercise. As no time could be spared for home work or

lesson revision, unobstructed attention to instructions in the classroom instilled in me the rewarding attitude of concentration on work. As the earning from tuitions during the pre-examination season had to cater for the whole year, breakfast, evening snacks and relishing of tempting eatables hawked by vendors could not be afforded. These compulsive restraints developed in me the habit of simple living, upright thinking, and the inclination of sharing whatever little I had with the equally needy friends and relatives.

I participated in the 'Quit India Movement' despite the caution by my teachers that I was playing havoc with my brilliant academic career. But it gave me great gratification that I turned out to be the only student throughout India whose scholarship was confiscated by the then government for participation in the freedom struggle. In spite of the periodic dislocation in my studies, I won a gold medal for standing first in BA., bagged another gold medal for having been adjudged as the best speaker in an All India Debate; and was a member of College Football Eleven. These achievements added to my self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus I undertook my subsequent pursuits; post-graduate education as well as life career, based on solid bedrock of practical experience.

I started my service as Lecturer in English. Those were the days when it was considered an obligation as to what could be done for the uplift of motherland. That dedication instilled optimism as well as perseverance, which kept away negative traits like selfishness, tension and frustration. That also provided a tonic for moral health and warded off defeatist mentality which sucks physical energy and erodes intellectual capacity. During my teaching career extending over three decades, I accepted many constructive challenges for bringing about academic innovations, suffered more snubs than earning any appreciation, but never wavered in my belief that truth triumphs ultimately, because neither feelings of fear infected me

nor jealousy impaired my steadfastness. Frugal living, singular devotion to work and clarity of purpose kept ensuring my physical well-being and equanimity of mind till my superannuation.

As father I tried to provide, whatever possible, for the all-round growth of my offspring, which the circumstances had denied to me. The successful emulation of the parental model which I offered for them was a gratifying reward. Thus, after my retirement at the age of sixty two, I had the satisfaction of having performed my duties as a citizen, as a teacher, and as a wordly man to the best of my ability.

I did not retreat from life, thereafter, but pledged with self not to waste my old age in protective isolation. I am an early riser and begin my daily work with a petitionary prayer seeking universal welfare. After that I attend to my other pursuits, neither displaying any haste nor craving for offering uncalled for advice, the usual addiction of the old, which causes unnecessary irritation. Thus, I do not allow my mind to become a battlefield.

I attend to all sort of correspondence regularly. Many old students, surviving friends and caring relatives enquire how I keep off boredom and the feelings of lonesomeness caused by the empty-nest syndrome. I reply quoting from one of my poems :

'Lonesomeness inflicts those with boredom  
Who tune themselves not to songs of life  
Watching from a corner the children play  
Strolling in the blooming parks and groves  
Listening to the symphony of chirping birds  
Observing the soothing beauty of setting sun  
Are the pursuits that ward off boredom  
If unable to create, one may appreciate'.

I am often asked about the attributes of positive outlook of which I am a votary. I draw their attention to another of my poems 'Art of Life', that reads :

'A reliable friend in all, ups and downs of life  
Is one's health, enviable wealth, none can steal  
Sustains joy by lending strength to hail strife.

Virtue of patience assists to conquer the self  
Is a rewarding talent which all should possess.  
Curbs anger and the craving for power and pelf.

Intellect, an inner light, during day and night.  
Elevates man higher than all living creatures.  
As it makes him rational, tolerant and upright.

If man keeps too a kind and considerate heart.  
To guide with his talents the infirm and weak.  
He looks supreme, for he leads life as an art.

These constitute my attitudes towards life. Senior citizenship or longevity are among the many returns which such a way of life offers.

By sharing the best in me with fellow beings, I keep adding to my zest to excel.

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## XII

### Old Age Health Problems

I underwent bypass surgery on August 18, 2001 in the United States of America. During convalescence I read the book, *Looking Younger, Staying Healthier, Living Longer* by Dr John J. Deller, a cardiologist. For increasing the readability of his text, the author has used few technical terms, so that common readers may understand it easily. I feel like sharing his observations.

The social environment prevailing and the medical facilities available in USA are not found in developing countries. Hence the guidelines suggested by Dr Deller have been modified according to common sense, which is the best guide.

Deller states that in spite of improved living conditions in the States, the common old age diseases continue to be heart disfunctioning (number one killer), strokes, pneumonia and chronic lung ailments.

The deteriorating family system, increasing number of divorces and single parenthood breed depression.

Deller lists the risk factors leading to heart ailments as follow :

#### Major

- (i) Smoking,
- (ii) Hypertension (high blood pressure), and
- (iii) High blood cholesterol.

#### Secondary

- (i) Sedentary life style,
- (ii) Obesity (fat body),
- (iii) Sticky blood,

- (iv) Diabetes,
- (v) Personality (hot heads),
- (vi) Enlarged heart and
- (vii) Post menopause (in case of women only).

With the exception of ‘enlarged heart’ all other risk factors can be minimized through preventive care. The author has epitomized the key to looking younger, staying healthier and living longer through a single word ‘Formula’, elaborated as follows :

- F for ‘Fitness and Fuel’,
- O for ‘Ounce of Prevention’,
- R for ‘Realist Retirement Planning’,
- M for ‘Mental Attitude’,
- U for ‘Understanding Yourself’,
- L for ‘Loving Life’,
- A for ‘Adapting to Change’.

It implies minimizing the health risks, maximizing the resultant gains and optimising the longevity. His observations are a blend of science, philosophy and common sense. Let us explore them.

### **Fitness and Fuel**

Body be kept slim and trim as it is the vehicle through which one experiences life. It requires regular physical activity, emotional warmth and mental awareness. Gluttons look bulky, bulgy and ugly. Hippocrates said aptly :

‘All parts of body which function, if used in moderation and exercised in labours to which each is accustomed, become thereby healthy and well developed’.

Hence hard exercise be avoided. Idleness and sedentary habits be given up. Retirement offers abundant time. Utilize it properly with the slogan ‘time for fitness’.

Fuel for healthy and active body is determined by the precaution ‘Man is, what he eats’. Hence eat lean, fats out, fibers in, fruits, vegetables and whole grain; protein source should focus on fish and white of egg; supplemented by A & E vitamins, minerals, calcium and zinc.

An aspirin a day does not let the blood grow sticky.

### **Ounce of Prevention**

Prevention being better than cure, regular medical check-ups be undertaken to guard off potential health hazards. This practice inculcates positive health habits and constructive attitudes.

Retirement may usher in a golden phase of life, if preventive care is observed.

### **Realistic Retirement Planning**

Retirement does not mean retreating from life. Being the golden phase it should be led methodically.

- (i) Relationship with all family members including spouse be readjusted. You have led your life. Let others lead it in their own way. Do not impose advice. Neither feel ignored, if not consulted.
- (ii) Manage to live within the budget.
- (iii) Do not be cut off from your social circle, particularly the old friends.
- (iv) Explore constructive leisure pursuits.

### **Mental Attitude**

One’s attitude guides the present and controls the future. Do not yield to invisible destiny but keep sticking to the chosen resolve. Fate is not on the palm but in the strength of palm.

## **Understanding Yourself**

Smile and not whine while you reconcile with yourself. When you are convinced that you understand yourself, have the courage to declare what you are. Live according to your beliefs, not at the cost of others but within your means.

There are more self-marred people than self-made ones. Many start with the ambition to transform the world, not heeding their family obligations. By fifties they feel frustrated, turn their attention to reform the society around them. When they find that they are a square peg in a round hole there too, they feel disenchanted and tend to improve their family relationship. By that time they have missed the bus and find themselves deserted and dejected.

Hence the necessity to understand the adage 'know thyself'. Start with self-improvement to become an ideal parent model, a useful neighbour and a responsible citizen.

## **Loving Life**

Give up recalling the adversities, relive in the memory of good days you passed. Remember the good qualities of others, condoning their shortcomings. Life is not like the evening newspaper supplement where bad events are headlined and the good ones are footnoted.

## **Adaptation to Change**

Change is the law of nature. One is never too old to change. It is said that ordinary people gossip about events, the mediocre ones discuss persons but the really promising analyse ideas. Hence choose as to how you wish to be categorised.

Only the vain claim that they know enough already. With their closed minds they start moving in ruts.

Closed mind is like a dwelling dark and dingy  
That admits not fresh air and necessary light  
Thus accepts not that change is law of nature  
Remains satisfied with usual routine of life.

Your attitude should be 'Golden age is ahead not behind'.  
Keep marching towards the destination accordingly.

## **Destination**

With birth, the march of life begins  
It crosses many custom-bound stages  
A few choose a definite destination  
And focus efforts in that direction.

The world assigns its rise and fall  
To this sort of good or bad persons  
The former seek 'what they can give'  
The latter plan 'what they may grab'.

The givers listen to their conscience  
They try earnestly to know themselves  
The talents they may further develop,  
The shortcomings they ought overcome.

I endeavour ever to discover myself  
To pinpoint the qualities I possess  
And the defects likely to damage me  
So that I may assess my solid worth.

I have precise and concise expression  
Proficient also in pragmatic approach  
Picked up knowledge about grassroots  
When facing the ups and downs of life.

In academic pursuits I got distinction  
During career race I was often ignored  
As I had the audacity not to acquiesce  
And stuck fearlessly to righteous goal.

Many rightful rewards were, thus, snatched  
But they served to strengthen my resolve  
Though pushed back yet kept in the track  
My grit encouraged the weak and wavering.

I pursue a modest but firm destination  
And devote my energy towards that goal  
For making the world better and nobler,  
Than this one; widely ignorant and poor.

Old age problems derail me now and then  
So often I miss the time-bound schedule  
But that seldom upsets and depresses me  
As I am pledged to stick to chosen goal.

If all of us resolve to strive thus  
To improve the world as best we can  
Sorrow and suffering would fade out  
The earth will become heaven itself.

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## About the Author



Name : Hazara Singh  
Date of Birth : November 30, 1922  
Qualifications : M.A., LL.B.  
Teaching Career : Started as Lecturer in English at Khalsa College, Amritsar on October 3, 1950.  
Retired as Head, Department of Journalism, Languages & Culture, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana.

Educational Achievements : Was awarded Rattigan Gold Medal by Khalsa College, Amritsar for standing first in B.A. (1945).  
The scholarship won on the result of Intermediate Examination (1943) was confiscated by the then Punjab Government for having taken part in the Quit India Movement.

Participation in Freedom Struggle : Was sent behind the bars thrice during 1942-45 for active participation in the freedom struggle.  
President, Punjab Students Congress (1945-46).

Membership : Fellow, Panjab University, Chandigarh  
(1956-62)

Published Works : Writes in English, Urdu and Punjabi.  
Has contributed more than 200 papers,  
short stories, poems, etc. to various  
magazines/journals.

Books : (i) Sikhism and Its Impact on Indian Society,  
(S.G.P.C., 1971, Amritsar)  
Revised and enlarged edition (1999)  
(ii) On the Use of Library,  
(PAU, Ludhiana, 1973)  
(iii) Style in Writing Technical Papers and Theses,  
(PAU, Ludhiana, 1976)  
(iv) Aspirations, (poems, 1980)  
(v) Yearnings, (poems, 1987)  
(vi) Expectations, (poems, 1999)  
(vii) Lala Lajpat Rai : An Appraisal, (2003)

Address : 3-C Udham Singh Nagar,  
Ludhiana- 141001 (India)  
Tel. : (0161) - 2302888

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