

WANTLESSNESS: A PANACEA FOR MATERIALISM

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Abstract

World today is witnessing a period of huge transformation. An avalanche of technological innovations are occurring one after the other. Humanity in general is going to experience more changes in next 20 years, than in previous 300 years. This might result in unrest and political upset which may lead to the collapse of the world or replacement of the present day structure. The old value system, the moral world is withering away swiftly and is being replaced by new materialistic aspects. The essence of a society having high moral standards is itself at the verge of extinction. The world is passing through a very difficult and critical time. The multinational companies are playing their marketing card very well i.e 'find a need and fill it'. They are targeting the psyche of the innocent masses. They know that people do not want their products or services, but want answers to their problems, solutions for their needs various paths to their wants and a secret door to their heart's desires. Needs are the simple things, which one must have. For instance food when one is hungry. Wants are the things which are liked by one but are not necessary, for instance, want for an ice-cream. Desires all are things which one hopes for, they are perfect motivators. Fears are the things which one does not want them to happen. An individual weighs his fears against his needs, wants and desires. Hence, the companies try to match up with needs, wants, desires and fears of a person, makes him satisfied and sell him goods, one after the other, by playing a perfectly manipulated game. Thus he get carried away with their gimmicks and becomes their target. He lands up ultimately buying and hoarding things which are actually not required by him. In spite of having a huge array of things, one feels lonely. The world is changing constantly and it cannot bring permanent happiness.

Keywords: Wantlessness, Needs, Wants, Desire, Turmoil.

World today is witnessing a period of huge transformation. An avalanche of technological innovations are occurring one after the other. Humanity in general is going to experience more changes in next 20 years, than in previous 300 years. This might result in unrest and political upset which may lead to the

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collapse of the world or replacement of the present day structure. Yuval Noah Harari in his novel *Homo Deus* writes to the extent that if we take the really grand view of life, all other problems and developments are overshadowed by three interlinked processes : science is converging on an all encompassing dogma, which says that organisms are algorithms and life is data processing; intelligence is decoupling from consciousness; non-conscious but highly intelligent algorithms may soon know us better than we know ourselves. (Harari, 2015). Professor Peter Turchin, in his latest, research predict; that the 2020's could bring society to an “instability peak” as issues over the rich poor divide, political infighting and government dysfunction coming to a lead. “Our society like all previous complex societies, is on a rollercoaster. Impersonal social forces bring us to the top; then comes the inevitable plunge. But the descent is not inevitable. Ours is the first society that can perceive how those forces operate, even if dimly. This means that we can avoid the worst perhaps by switching to a less harrowing track, perhaps by redesigning the rollercoaster altogether.” (Mansfield, 2017)

The old value system, the moral world is withering away swiftly and is being replaced by new materialistic aspects. The essence of a society having high moral standards is itself at the verge of extinction. The world is passing through a very difficult and critical time. “Never before in history has so much responsibility been inherited by a group of human beings. Where in previous times the lives of individual nations and culture were at stake, today the stake is the destiny of all humanity”. (Brown, 1984). Gap between the haves and have nots is widening more and more as a result of globalization in the name of one global village. The rich are becoming richer and the poor are becoming poorer. Poor people remain trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. Zamny Minton Beddoes, Economics editor for the Economist magazine said “Growing inequality is one of the biggest social, political and economic challenges we face. However, it is not inevitable”. Every individual rich or poor wants each and every comfort of life which he has been exposed to by the media without considering his status or economic restrictions. The race to grab the latest and the best thing in the market has made everyone hysterical. Each and every child wants to get the latest mobile phone available in the market. Not only that everyone wants to keep pace with the day to day changing technology. If any model of anything purchased today becomes old in a few months it has to be replaced by the latest model, be it a television, fridge, mobile phone or a car.

The multinational companies are playing their marketing card very well i.e 'find a need and fill it'. They are targeting the psyche of the innocent masses. They know that people do not want their products or services, but want answers to their problems, solutions for their needs, various paths to their wants and a secret door to their heart's desires. Needs are the simple things, which one must have. For instance food when one is hungry. Wants are the things which are liked by one but are not necessary, for instance, want for an ice-cream. Desires all are things which one hopes for, they are perfect motivators. Fears are the things which one does not want them to happen. An individual weighs his fears against his needs, wants and desires. Hence, the companies try to match up with needs, wants, desires and fears of a person, makes him satisfied and sell him goods, one after the other, by playing a perfectly manipulated game. Thus he get carried away with their gimmicks and becomes their target. He lands up ultimately buying and hoarding things which are actually not required by him. In spite of having a huge array of things, one feels lonely. The world is changing constantly and it cannot bring permanent happiness. One might have what one wants at a particular time but that cannot last forever. Not only the world but one's desires are also changing constantly. Something might bring a lot of pleasure for a short time, but one might not remain satisfied with it for a long time. One might be looking for always something better or something latest. So the pursuit of pleasure does not lead to lasting happiness. Many times desires themselves, rather than their not being met might be the problem. Some desires might not effect the health of an individual however others might not be conducive to ones wellbeing. Many desires distort the path of reality and make one loose the main perspective of what was more important. When there is a difference between what one wants and what one has there is a lot of discontentment and sadness in one's mind. It does not go very easily and constantly keeps on troubling one's mind. In this way one looses inner peace. No amount of fulfilling one's desires can bring back this inner peace. Many of these desires even turn into cravings, obsessions and greed Being greedy and selfish makes one feel very sad. It gets converted into a kind of addiction which goes unrecognised. It makes one to be self centered. The concern for others wellbeing finishes. The endless desire for more and more material comforts, money and various possessions makes an individual blind to the daily pleasures of family life. One becomes so involved in achieving ones daily targets that one has no time to enjoy the small joys of a simple family life. The list of human wants and desires is endless it does not end, but keeps on increasing day by day.

The time has come to take some grave decisions when all the goodness in the man, must come forward to suppress the bad; when the survival is depending upon the victory of prudence and intellect over absurdity and dogma. At this time when humanity is groaning under the crushing burden of numerous miseries and is struggling with the nightmare of a future which seems very traumatic and terrifying, the course indicated by the unerring fingers should come as a solace to the humanity which is seeking happiness, prosperity and goodwill for all. In this quagmire of darkness Mahatma Gandhi's teachings come like a ray of hope for the masses. Gandhiji advocated the theory of wantlessness. According to him, the world is a state of unhappiness, turmoil and away from peace, happiness only because of multiplicity of human wants. He once observed "the itch to own things for the mere pride of possession is the disease of pretty vulgar minds". (Tendulkar, 1962). Gandhi worked for economic simplicity. According to him only when material wants are limited, an environment can be created in which the individual would be able to discover his true identity. For this one would have to lower one's ego in the service of others. Gandhiji believed in deliberate curtailment of wants. "If by abundance you mean every one having plenty to eat and drink and to clothe himself with, enough to keep his mind trained and educated, I should be satisfied. But I should not like to pack more stuffs to my belly than I can digest and more things than I can ever usefully use. But neither do I want poverty, penury, misery, dirt and dust in India". (Harijan, 1968). He very rightly replied to an interviewer that "The fact is, the material resources of the West have advanced out of proportion to its moral resources, and something need be done to bring them in a level with each other". (Young India, 1927). Gandhiji replied, "That is precisely what the charkha is intended to do.". In 1938 while discussing the possibility of peace he had occasion to remark, "This again seems impossible without great nations ceasing to believe in soul-destroying competition and to multiply wants and thereby increasing their material possessions.". (Harijan, 1938). He clarified his views further, "I cannot only imagine but am working for a civilisation in which possession of car will be considered no merit and railways will find no place. It would not be for me an unhappy event if the world once more became as large as it used to be at one time..... it is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant, dark ages. But it is an attempt to see beauty in voluntary simplicity, poverty and slowness..... the modern rage for variety, for flying through the air, for multiplicity of wants, etc. have no fascination for me. They deaden the inner being in us.". (Harijan, 1939). "High thinking is inconsistent with complicated material life based on high speed imposed on us by Mammon worship. All the graces of life are possible only when we learn the art of living nobly."

(Harijan, 1946). To the question whether such plain living is possible for an isolated nation, he replied: "The answer is straight and simple. If plain life is worth living, then the attempt is worth making even if an individual or a group makes the effect". (Harijan, 1946). "As I was picturing life based on non-violence I saw that it must be reduced to the simplest terms consistent with high thinking". (Harijan, 1940). "A certain degree of physical harmony and comfort is necessary, but above a certain level it becomes a hindrance instead of help. Therefore the idea of creating an unlimited number of wants and satisfying them seems to be delusion and snare. The satisfaction of one's physical needs, even the intellectual needs of one's narrow self, must meet at a certain point a dead stop, before it degenerates into physical and intellectual voluptuousness. A man must arrange his physical and cultural circumstances so that they do not hinder him in his service of humanity on which all his energies should be concentrated." (Harijan, 1936). "Our civilisation our culture, our Swaraj depend not upon multiplying our wants self-indulgence, but upon restricting our wants, self-denial." (Young India, 1921). He had occasion to remark quite early, "I should not have laboured my point as I have done, if I did not believe that, in so far as we have made the modern materialistic craze our goal, so far are we going downhill in the path of progress. I hold that economic progress in the sense I have put it is a antagonistic to real progress. Hence the ancient ideal has been the limitation of activities promoting wealth. This does not put an end to all material ambition. We should still have, as we have always had, in our midst people who make the pursuit of wealth their aim in life. But we always recognised that it is a fall from the ideal..... That you cannot serve God and Mammon is an economic truth of the highest value. We have to make our choice. Western nations are today groaning under the heel of the monster God of materialism. Their moral growth has become stunted....I refer to these things because they are held to be symbolical of material progress. But they add not an atom to our happiness". (Harijan, 1916).

However, there is a paradoxical twist in Gandhian method of solving economic problem of unlimited wants and limited resources. It almost amounts to putting the energy in the reverse gears. Instead of satisfying maximum wants with limited resources Gandhi advocated the theory of wantlessness. He was of the opinion that wants are the source of pain. Instead of adding to the sum total of human happiness wants subtract from it to a good deal. As a matter of fact he believed that the maximization of satisfaction is rather completely inconsistent with the maximization of human wants. A want is quite a painful experience. That is certainly evident from the fact that one wishes to satisfy it and wants to get

rid of it as soon as possible. If one does bothers to remove or satisfy it, it continues to be painful. So the removal of wants is the removal of pain from one system and procurement of total pleasure. This pleasure is something as supreme satisfaction or utility. Thus for one to procure maximum pleasure, one should be vigilant enough to see to it that all pain is removed and no fresh pain is experienced in future. At least this is the ideal for any one and everyone who wants to achieve maximum pleasure from his limited resources.

In the Bhagwad Gita, a book which was very dear to Gandhi a quite says, “As enjoyments born of contacts (with external objects) have a beginning and an end, they become the course of unhappiness. This wise man, O Kaunheya! does not find happiness in them”. (Tilak,1899). Not only is the enjoyment of physical things, short-lived but there is also no limit to the desire of such things. Gandhi has explained in these beautiful words: “The human mind is like a restless bird, the more it gets, the more it wants and still remains unsatisfied”. (Gandhi, 1933). The Kathopnishad also agrees with this. (Kathopnishad). The Indian view point is that happiness has very little to do with the consumption of worldly things. It depends upon the mental state of a person.

It is a matter of common experience that a man, who is fabulously rich, generally remains worried, both mentally and physically and by no stretch of imagination can he be called a happy man. On the other hand a person, not living in luxury, or even in comfort, is found to be happy and well continued. The example of millions of Indian villagers can be cited in proof thereof. And again when one helps someone with money or other worldly things, judged by the economists stand-point, he must grow unhappy but all of us know that this is far from the truth. Hence, it can safely be concluded that beyond a limit, the multiplication of wants and their satisfaction do not promote happiness and certainly not in the same sameproportion. Some extracts from the speech of Mahatma Gandhi, which he delivered under the auspices of the Economic Society of the Muir Central College, Allahabad on December 22,1916: “Every human being has a right to live and, therefore, to find the wherewithal to feed himself and where necessary to clothe and house himself. But for this very simple performance we need no assistance from economists and their laws...The only statement that has to be examined is whether it can be laid down as a law of universal application that material advancement means moral advancement”. “Now let us take a few illustrations. Rome suffered a moral fall when it attained high material affluence. So did Egypt and so, perhaps most countries of which we have and historical record. The descendants and kinsmen of the

royal and divine Krishna too fell when they were rolling in riches”. ...But Jesus answereth...Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God”. I should have not laboured my point as I have done. I do not believe that in so far as we have made the modern materialistic craze our goal, in so far we are going down the hill in the path of progress. Hence the ancient ideal has been limitation of activities promoting wealth”.

A person by having an aim in life and working whole heartedly for it, is compelled to select his wants which may be helpful in the fulfilment of the object. The work alone gives him happiness through he neglects his worldly comforts, sometimes even his food. Gandhi sacrificed many worldly comforts and subordinated his wants to this oe aim and still remain happy. So will it be wrong to conclude that the aim in life and devotion to this aim automatically reduces wants and promote happiness. Gandhi admits that a certain degree of comfort physical and cultural, is essential for the moral and spiritual advancement. But the satisfaction of these needs must bot go beyond a certain level, otherwise it will degenerate into physical and intellectual voluptuousness.” (1936). The aim should not be multiplicity of material wants but their restrictions consistent with comfort. One should not choose to think of getting what he can. On the other hand, he should decline to receive what others cannot get”. (Dhawan, 1946)

Thus, it can be concluded, that social unrest and political upset in the society can be overcome by following Gandhi's principle of wantlessness. The society can be at peace and happy if there is voluntary minimization of human wants. When everyone in the society is satisfied by achieving the target of his basic needs and not hoarding wealth, normalcy is found to come in the society. With this, occupational equilibrium, ecological balance and co-operative living could be attained. Wantlessness also promotes mutual help, cooperation and sharing, brings out talents and curbs exploitation, coercion, violence and bad feelings among each other. The road to a particular destination remains the same, if we travel by a small or a big car. The destination also remains the same, if we reach there in a bus or a car or train. The time remains the same if it is seen with a cheap quality watch or an expensive watch. Needs should be taken care of but they should not be converted indogreeds. As rightly said by Mahatma Gandhi, “The earth provides enough to satisfy every man's needs, but not every man's greed”. He was in favour of the fact that the persons also were endowed with aptitude and skill are free to produce more goods in the society and earn accordingly. They should enjoy the fruit of their hard work and labour.

Purva Mimaansa

A Multi-disciplinary Bi-annual Research Journal
(Referred Peer Reviewed)

Vol. 11, Issue March-September 2020

ISSN: 0976-0237

UGC Approved Journal No.: 40903

Impact Factor: 3.765

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