

Digitized Development and Diminishing Happiness

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The post-Second World War era has shifted the world's focus from *happiness* to *development* as the major prop of pell-mell lifestyle. The development dominated by economic tools like returns on investment, GDP growth, global market place etc has undermined the other considerations of wholesomeness. It is, I think, something similar to the influence of cricket over other sports in India.

The all-round technological advancement, be it in metallurgy, power, cement, and in information sector (IT), has greatly and more rapidly influenced our lifestyle during the last 50 years than what happened in the preceding centuries. Some of the influences of IT interventions have been so fast that many times it becomes difficult to catch up with the present pace of developments, leaving no time for thinking about the past and the future.

While it is good, on the one hand, that people are struggling to improve their lifestyle goaded by an illusion of creating a bright future, there has been a notable decline in the level of their happiness. The King of Bhutan, for the first time in the year 1972, declared a national policy of measuring the growth by 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH) rather than 'Gross Domestic Product' (GDP) widely accepted world over. Since then Thailand, Singapore and a few more countries got attracted to the merit of this concept. The United Nations

came out with the first 'World Happiness Report' forty years later, in the year 2012. The UN survey report of 2016 has put India at 118 place out of 157 countries. Surprisingly, according to the survey, India is even below our neighbouring countries like Pakistan, and Sri Lanka on the happiness count. Despite unquestionably higher pace of development in India for the past couple of decades now, this situation is alarming and some of the states in India are now considering to form 'Ministry of Happiness'. A quick review of this situation reveals the following snags that might have inspired them to tackle the situation.

The first snag is that the digitized development modules have ignored social support systems. For example, today we find that a good number of underutilized homes are getting converted into hotel-type accommodations for rent to tourists.

Many educated youths are now driving taxis as they find it economically more rewarding than other options available. This has been made possible by 'Apps' through IT interventions which have made life easier in this mobile world. However, its impact on the existing taxi and autorickshaw drivers in the unorganized sector is becoming more and more visible. It is generating unemployment among the deprived sections of the society. Moreover, recent trends of 'Start Up' companies are yet to get into the real concerns of India such as rural health

care systems, energy from waste and many more.

Secondly, return on investments being the prime guiding factor for market is leading to incomplete development, particularly in the field of urban dwelling. Today there are many towns of India that have witnessed tremendous growth in high-rise townships for accommodating many lives in smaller landscapes. Thus the density of population per square kilometer is steadily rising. On one hand, it is good as it is promoting community living, but one major aspect, namely proper drainage of waste water, has received least attention in the overall development schemes. The apartment builders usually leave the drainage concerns to the respective Municipal Corporations. In many developed colonies the possibility of increasing the drainage capacity appears to be quite remote. The drainage system of Kolkata having the largest population density in some parts is a glaring example of this drainage problem despite large funding from institutions like the Asian Development Bank. Getting into new flats is quite pleasant but the happiness becomes shortlived once the issues such as drainage systems create inconveniences both within homes and on the roads and this trend is bound to be aggravated in the coming decades in many towns of the country.

Many more concerns

There are many more concerns that reduce the happiness levels. The UN has given six pointers in its World Happiness Report. These are GDP growth, social support systems, healthy life, freedom to

make choices in life, generosity and trust. Mostly the European countries, according to the Report, are leading in the enjoyment of overall happiness, followed by Canada, United States, and then Asia.

India today is emerging as a growth engine of the world on GDP growth rate, but its social support systems for the common people are failing on many counts. Medical sciences have improved, no doubt, but majority of the facilities are beyond the reach of the common people despite some organized sectors coming out with optimum cost and high-volume concepts of patients handling in their business modules. Recently we are witnessing more and more interventions in our lifestyle choking the freedom of making personal life choices. Combined effect of all these are lowering generosity levels and depleting trust.

In the given backdrop there is an urgent need to inculcate moral and spiritual values so that our actions are moistened with love and feelings while trying to speed up the developmental growth. Apart from official planners and government agencies, senior citizens of the society too can play some role in this field by passing on their knowledge, experience, and skills. Time has come when they can try to encourage the youth to lead a 'happy life' by guiding them to make proper life choices, and oppose faulty social support systems besides instilling in them concepts of generosity and trust. Diminishing happiness deserves to be arrested and efforts are needed to reverse the trend, particularly in India. Dissemination of values upheld by Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda among common people worldwide, I believe, will go a long way in achieving this objective. ■

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