

The Principal Business of Life is to Enjoy it

Men live, while animals and birds exist. And so they do not live by bread alone howsoever uncultured they may be. It is something more than bread that they are constantly in quest of. Discontent and disappointment have a strong grip on them when their labour remains to be the labour of a slave. Then they fret and fume like a fidgety and restive horse tethered in its stable. And when their enigmatic desire remains unfulfilled, they philosophise if they can think, otherwise they demolish what some in the fulfillment of their known or unknown aspirations accomplish. But what is it that makes a man's life full? What is the complement of his labour in diverse fields? What is the incentive to labour? The answer to all these questions is only one thing, so abstract, yet so real. And that is 'pleasure', which all struggle and aspire for, but few achieve in the true sense of the word. In most cases it remains will-o' the wisp.

No two human beings being alike, the ways in which people try to get pleasure from life are hardly alike, despite the seeming similarity in their means to the end. Apart from that one's temperament and intellectual caliber greatly determines the manner in which one hopes to get the maximum of pleasures.

Some carry on their pursuits passively, while others exert themselves physically and mentally. Pleasures of the second type are more active. They by their individual participation squeeze the last drop. Whether young or old, rich or poor life seldom becomes a dull affair for them. They may not be good singers, dancers or players; but they know in what the secret of pleasure lies. Alone or in a crowd they are always themselves, never wishing for pleasure to be doled out to them. They, instead of being satisfied with paper flowers, let their hands be bruised with the thorns as they pluck lovely roses embowered in the leaves. Always eager to play their role in the game of enjoyment, they always get fun fresh, never stale. Theirs is ever new, never hackneyed; ever engrossing, never boring; ever satisfying, never leading to ennui. And whatever the nature of their work for their livelihood, they invest it with a charm and enjoy doing it.

Zorba the Greek thinks that the proper way to drink the cup of life to the lees and get thrill out of it is abandonment to sensual pleasures. He thinks and lives like a Hedonist without any restraint on his compulsive instincts and urges. Babar who said "Babar, let your efforts aim at merry making, as you have no second life to live" seems to have thought that ultimate purpose of life was no better than pleasure. Had it been otherwise he would have not missed the pleasures of Samarkand even after having conquered a part of India. Omar Khayyam, the

great Persian poet, astronomer, has expressed similar passions in some of his Rubaiyaats.

Nevertheless if sensualists are susceptible to women and wine, the Epicureans though advocating the pursuit of pleasure disapprove of any such pleasure as ends in pain. The modern youths who love the wayward way of life with LSD trips or marijuana, would naturally spurn cautious pursuit of pleasure. Theirs, of course, seems to be the attitude of the Lotus Eaters. Youth, tingling in their veins, though at a low ebb, they do not want it be subject to thinking which puts restraint on their permissiveness. They are our modern Dr. Faustuses ready to barter their souls to Mephistophilis so that they may gratify their baser instincts. But why should one grudge them their pleasures when the purpose of life is to enjoy it? If they know no moderation, it is their attitude and outlook. Why should we play Malvolio's role and object to the pleasures of these Sir Toby Belches?

If some think that there can be no pleasure better than what thrills their senses, some others try to have it from what provokes their intellect and satisfied their aesthetic sense. Some such persons get pleasure from reading poetry; while others, by writing it. If at one moment their job is akin to the one which John Keats had when he first read Chapman's Translation of Homer, at another moment it is the all engrossing pleasure which Keats had when he wrote the Grecian Urn and thought that a thing of beauty is a joy forever. In fact when some of us prefer to read the Meghduta to listening to pedestrian film songs it is a question of our taste and concept of pleasure. Whether we are the pensive men of Milton's *IL Penseroso* or the cheerful man of his *L' Allegro*, pleasure remains the sole purpose of our life. In that case we love to read *War and Peace* instead of seeing the filmed version of the novel though distributors and exhibitors may lure us by tempting advertisements. The new prefer a Satyajit Ray's film to the beat-film which is not so great a box-hit that it runs for fifty weeks. A question of taste, of course! Nothing else.

And he who writes lyrics though living in penury does so because it instills in him a feeling of joy when words become liquid emotions at his command. The pursuit may not make him a Nobel Laureate or a national poet; but if we take away the muse from him and give him everything else which mostly people long for, he languishes like a young maiden parted from her lover. No joy other than the one which such an impassioned soul gets by writing poetry can be a substitute. The purpose of his life is to enjoy it in the requested company of his Muse. Ghalib might have written letters to his patron friend complaining about this poverty, but we wonder if life would have been so pleasant to him if he had goblets of wine, but had been not writing ghazals.

No less is painters' passion for life. They might long for love as Van Gogh did, but the fountain head of their joy is their capacity to transform pigments into silent yet eloquent figures, calm yet whispering nature, triangle and squares yet symbols of human urges. Living in privation, spurning life of comfort like Paul Gauguin and living in self-imposed exile, they find the pursuit of their art the only thing that can make them have a sense of fulfillment and joy. We do not know whether Michel Angelo's urge was joy that he got from his frescoes or anything else. Some psycho-analyst or sociologist would throw better light on it.

Whatever people, who think that women and wine alone can make one's life joyful, might say about such musicians as Ravi Shankar and Bismillah Khan (to name only a few), Abt Vogler's sole joy was music. So it was with Bach and Beethoven. Sehgal might have loved his bottle and money bag that his acting in films never let deplete. But it was vocal music which gave him the feeling of enjoying life. Had it not been so, he would have not cared to subject himself to rigid discipline of the voice and practice (*riaz*) but for which no classical singer can sing. Without this feeling he would have remained contented with his job as a clerk.

It does not imply that only creative artists think that life is to enjoy it and nothing else. Our explorers, conquerors of invincible peaks and scientists are inspired by the same passion. Exposing themselves to the inclemencies of weather, the explorers go on the uncharted ocean, the mountaineers brave the most unfriendly weather, and the scientists prefer the company of the mute insensate to the enchanting warm embraces like Aldous Huxley's genius in his novel entitled the *Genius and the Goddess*. Because nothing else would give them a feeling of joy. Cut off from their cherished pursuit they would feel like a person pushed into an abyss of misery.

But what about the politicians? Is not their sole aim to have power? Do they not love to be honoured and feared like gods who sit by their springs of nectar heedless of the weeping and crying men struck by calamities? Or are they not possessed with the earnest zeal to better the lot of the underdog as in some communist and socialist countries? Do not they, who like Che Gulvera (though not suffering from chronic asthma like him) prefer the risky life of guerillas to smug comforts of peaceful home life, spurn the joys of life? To raise such question is nothing but to betray one's ignorance of human nature. They who seem to reject the pleasures of the present so that others, who do not enjoy what some others enjoy, may also enjoy them, certainly get a pleasure though it is not comprehensible to ordinary human beings. After all the concept of enjoyment is not one and only one. Its colour and form change as the perspective changes.

Some sceptical persons might say that it is stretching the meaning of enjoyment too far. They might be right as myopics and colour blind people are about their visions. Let them be contented with their concept of pleasure and think that enjoyment can be had only when they go to see a movie, watch the T.V., see a match being played, go with friends and chat with them, go to a cabaret or read the *Playboy*. Who dare contradict them? They certainly understand what the main purpose of life is. But if cranks can be suffered, why some persons should not be. If they think that they alone enjoy life, let dogs and apes speak and tell them whether animals enjoy their life better or these men folk. But why should we make this minor point a cause of conflict? We do not want to convert them to a particular faith. We only want them to co-exist with those who in their language are abnormal and who enjoy life as they wish and will. Above all they who live life with a purpose enjoy it as much as those who do not. No less pleasure do they, who have been educated about the art of living, derive from their lives than those who grow like Lucy far from the madding crowd in close communion with nature, or those who never see the rising sun as they return from their revelries late at night like Lord Byron.