Life

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Life is mysterious from the genesis to the demise. Agony and ecstasy are alternating between the two points in time, birth and death. Death is part of life in as much as living itself. Life is precarious, full of uncertainty, vicissitudes with its inevitable rhythm of ups and downs. Fame and decline, luck and misfortune, rise and fall, characterise human lives as well as institutions. Thus, one reads about the rise and fall of great empires. There are always new waves to replace those of the old.

Since time immemorial, man struggles to seek answers to the mystery of life. Learned men of yesteryears attempted to come up with a explication of life, living, death and after–death. The law of expiation seems to be the most logical and persuasive. Yet shadow of doubt, skepticism will continue from time to time to cast over the perplexity of the philosophy. Only a few enlightened sages will be able to grasp the real meanings of the noble principle of the Law of Karma.

As the present writer was strolling in a park in Tokyo back in December 1985, an encounter propelled him to forge out a poem reflecting his feeling at that particular moment. Indeed, the serene environment of the park and the atmosphere of tranquility should have spelled serenity on his soul but strangely, he felt extremely down, overcome dy solitude. For a moment, he cotemplated a last resort of escape unbecoming of his background and stature.

But as he strolled along further in half delirium, he came to a clearing where a crowd of young boys and girls in their teens were engaged in cheerful playing. Their faces were radiant, unmindful of other businesses except their happy games. All of a sudden, he felt a warm and enlivening spell replacing the chill of depressed feeling in him. Here lied the scene of joy, youth, and living spirit, symbolising the continuity of life. It was the hope of the future, it signified the eternity of the living creatures created by the Almighty.

As he stared into the horizon, he composed in his mind a haiku poem reflecting his sentiments and the aftermath of the inner struggle. The poem reflected an

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understanding of the ultimate and yet there existed the will to continue the fighting for the toil of life.

In contemplation,
Life is but empty dreams,
And illusions !
Horizon beyond,
Rises the red golden sun,
A new day takes on !

Likhit Dhiravegin
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On another occasion, the writer had the good fortune of having an opportunity to stroll along a beach in Bombay early in the morning. Having been away from the routines and the regimented work and living schedules, he could reflect upon life and the environment. Again he could become himself, a simple man who saw around him human drama and human life as it was. How often can the so-called modern man in the city enjoy the chance of being himself and sees things the way they are rather through the lens of social values created by himself ? Indeed, it is surprising how men have *entrapeped* themselves in something they have created. The Point in Time at Juhu Beach, Bombay symbolises a temporary escape from the entrapment.

Point in Time at Juhu Beach, Bombay

A snapshot is a still photograph whereas movies, as the term suggests, are pieces of pictures dynamically moving in a chain which produce events or a scenario. The dynamic life of modern society in which one is pushed about by tight schedule, and physically moved about in sophisticated transportation vehicle can be compared to movies. There are thus very few occasions in which one can sit back, relax, and start a process of reflection, introspection and the quest within. Before one knows it, one is propelled by the modern way of life and livelihood in such a frenzied pace and programmed trajectory that, in the process, one is lost in the machinery of modern organization. Worst of all, unless one makes a conscious effort to retain it, one may lose the humanistic aspect of life which in the final analysis is the highest value of human philosophy.

For someone who is lucky enough to have left the routine and the familiar environment and place himself at a particular point in time and space to avail himself of the opportunity to reflect upon what he sees is a rare experience. Once the mind is free from the imprisonment of the career requirements and the fixed framework in which things are viewed, the humanistic perspective starts to become clearer. As such, a stroll along the Juhu Beach in Bombay early in the morning when the sun starts to shine on the silver sand against the background of the sound of the gentle waves will bring one back into harmony with nature in which he is again a common man, a human being, trying to make out of the environment. Being a stranger in the land, everything he

sees or hears will trigger reactions in a purer form than those who are accustomed to the scene.

The scores of relaxed fellow human beings who were strolling in a relaxed manner along the beach somehow had the effect of making one share the feeling. This is probably the logic behind the Japanese Noh drama with its slow pace and philosophical tone which helped sober the warriors whose spirit had been aroused by warfare. And as the sun rose higher, the scens became more varied. Two cows were running in a race. The sacred cows and India are two inseparable part. Many look at cow worship by the Hindu as a "scientifically irrational" practice. But if one is to give it a more serious thought, one will find the logical linkage between cow worship and economic, social, psychological rationale. Economically, a cow can serve as a source of animate energy, extremely necessary for transportation and production. It gives out food for the owner: milk, butter and other cooking for the household. Cowdung is used for fertilizer and fuel, serving both objectives of agricultural production and energy. Socially and psychologically, cow worship works to prevent the animals from being killed, a preservation of the source of energy and food. It also serves a spiritual value and religious ritual. It is note–worthy how much an animal can be utilised for human existence.

At another corner, one saw a few camels walking slowly carrying some parents with children on their backs. Camels are interesting. An animal smaller than an elephant but bigger than a horse. The physical look is alien for those who live in a region where camels do not exist. But the focal point is camel riding here. As in any other recreation places, the scene of parents trying to let their children having fun is invariably a beautiful scene. Indeed, if one wants to see happy faces filled with tenderly love, one should visit the zoo. The scene of young couples who are in their romantic mood and parents their compassionate love and care for the children would give one a sense of empathetic warmth and inner joy. The scene at Juhu Beach where the children were giggling playing their game is indeed a beautiful scene. Along a similar vein, young children enjoying their horseback riding on the beach produced the same sentiment. It is a scene of life and joy. It is a humanistic behaviour, free from worries and bondage of human creation, status, power and position.

At another corner, one sees the cute and yet interesting nature of peaceful co–existence, mutual benefit and inter–dependence. Two crows were standing on the back of a pony searching for food feeding on his back or just resting on a pal's body which serves as a spacious lawn. As in the case of the camels, the horses are for hire. Young children ventured on the steed's back represents two elements, independence and guts. Horseback riding is a one–man's game. No one can assist the rider. Camel riding can be compared to piloting a plane because it can seat more than one person. The instructor

can help guide the student. In the case of the camel, the parent can sit behind and protect his child or give a sense of protection. It is said that horseback riding is a very challenging sport. It is a game in which two different souls, a man and an animal, have to be harmonised. They have to learn to understand each other. Also, an order given by the rider will have to be both forceful and gentle, a contradiction of a kind but giving rise to the art of being compassionately kind and yet commanding, corresponding to the Thai political and administrative art of *pra kun* (kindness) and *pra dej* (commanding power) or simply carrot and stick. Horseback riding also caters to mental and physical exercise. Mentally, one has to learn to concentrate, to develop confidence. If one is nervous, the horse will also become nervous. Somehow, the animal has a special sensory perception. Physically, it is one of the best exercises, helping keep the person shapely and most important of all, the process of trotting and cantering will literally shake off the person on the back that one feels like having all the trouble, physical and psychological, shaken loose. Last is a sense of gratification if harmony can be established between the two beings physically and mentally. It can be a most beautiful relationship. Indeed, there are stories of husbands who have incurred jealousy from wives because of the care they have given to their horses.

On any beach, be it, Juhu, Rio de Janeiro, Pattaya, Waikiki, you are bound to see people who are apprehensive of obesity. Jogging along the beach not only give you a physical work-up but a sense of mental gratification. At one corner of Juhu Beach, one saw an old man standing up with hands raised, breathing in as much clean air as possible as if to keep it in reserve before he ventured out into the polluted city again. Exercise is not confined to human beings. Here and there one saw people leading their canine friends for a stroll. Leading the dog or sometimes being led by the dog in a scene depicting a status symbol. Dogs have many functions. Apart from being friend, faithful and loyal guard, dogs can also be made status symbol. Indeed, social critics often compare ilfe of a dog in a well-to-do family with a poor man. It is dehumanising to come up with facts which buttress the fact that the amount spent on feeding a dog may run higher than the meagre budget spent for a family of three. In Bangkok now-a-days, a box of bog food will cost about 30% of a minimum wage required by law.

Then as here and elsewhere, men have to survive by partaking food and water. Food stalls lined up the beach. But one thing which was unique characteristic of the beach perhaps was the stalls offering coconut juice with its white meat. A four-rupee natural drink was a great attraction here. The water was refreshing although its sweetness could be improved. The meat could either be thin and soft or thick and munchy. But the taste and the sight of tall coconut trees would give an impression right away that it was a coastal area where the tropical climate allowed for such fruit to be borne. One would think of Thailand, the Philippines, Hainan Island. For one who was from Southeast Asia, he would be brought closer to home as he sipped the water from the nut.

Despite the attempt to relax and no matter how one tries to avoid the issue of justice, one is bound to be drawn into reflecting on it. Here on Juhu Beach, an old man was leading a breathtakingly beautiful horse for exercise. The horse which, according to one of the coconut sellers, cost a fortune, belonged to a wealthy family, an elite who picked up horseback riding as an exercise. It is obviously a horse only a millionaire could afford. No wonder it looked so much different from those horses which were for hire. As the sun rose higher, a number of economically deprived women, carrying baby, were soliciting donation for the next meal. The sight of a boy riding with fun on a camel's back or a horseback, comparing with a small girl, who had been taught by her mother to make gesture begging for money to buy food presented a great contrast. But this was not a unique phenomenon at Juhu. In any society which suffers from the problem of income maldistribution, it is an expected scene.

But the contrast became even more discernable as one strolled back to the air-conditioned lobby of the hotel near by. Here one saw people walking about in their fancy sari. Guests with well-tailored dresses moved along with their preoccupations. Out there, the relaxed scene mixing up with the economically poor folks were two contrasting realities. The sun rose higher and higher. The day wore on. The one point in time at Juhu Beach is a still picture only when one tried to keep it still like a snapshot. But life goes on along its course and cycle, for years, for decades, for centuries and for millennium. But who would deny that one point in time did exist at Juhu Beach in historical reality? The one point in time of simple human drama, living and life !

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