

Essay

① "A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in".

It was the India of late 1920s and early 1930s, when on the one hand, the Mahatma's Dandi March marked the launch of the Civil Disobedience in India, and on the other hand, a ferocious wave of revolutionaries led by the likes of Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Sukhdev Thapar, Surya Sen, etc. had shook the colonial spirit.

In the unforgiving terrains of Chittagong, Bengal, Surya Sen also known as "Master Da" — an ordinary-looking school teacher — would orchestrate a 2-year-long struggle against the

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Understanding - 30

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Analysis - 6

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mighty Raj. Starting from armoured raids, railway blockades and even establishing a parallel government - Surya Sen fought a battle that he knew he would never win in his lifetime. But he played his part and gave his all just so that the next generations of Indians would be free from clutches of colonialism.

Indeed, be it the Mahatma or the young trio of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev, and Rajguru, or be it Surya Sen or Netaji Bose - they all planted trees of sacrifice whose shade of freedom they knew they shall never sit in.

Throughout humanity's history, the societal progress has rested on the selfless service & sacrifices of the few.

→ Can add a paragraph after intro explaining what you will be conveying in this essay.

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In the ancient period, workers & devotees would toil hard and carve out Viharas out of unrelenting rocks of Barabar, Karle, Kanheri, etc. so that monks and travellers for centuries to come could move freely throughout the country.

For millenia, few men have continued to make the Supreme Sacrifice so that society at large can enjoy a sweet slumber every night. Legendary warriors like Arun Khetrapal and Vikram Batra, while still in their pristine youth, have laid down their lives to uphold the nation's sovereignty - and they very well knew that they would never taste the freedom and safety for which they were fighting so valiantly.

"Freedom is not free - a few pay its price with their sweat and blood"
- Gen. KJ's Dhillon

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This tradition of selfless service is not limited to freedom fighters or soldiers alone. Even today, one can find examples of dedication to duty, where people are ready to give their everything.

For instance, the health warriors during COVID-19 worked endless hours, at the risk of their own lives & those of their family, to manage the unprecedented health crisis.

During the Bhopal gas tragedy, plant manager Saifuddin went deep into the leakage area to turn off the pipelines, while knowing that he would never be able to come out alive.

But such stories of heroism are not limited to history books or newspapers or a TV show. If we look at the lives of our own forefathers and parents, we would find

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countless examples of selflessness. A father endures a lifetime of grind to build a house - whose ~~share~~ he would perhaps only enjoy for a few retirement years. He thinks thrice before spending a few rupees on himself, but readily spends a fortune for his child's education.

And a mother - the epitome of sacrifice - she lets go of all her dreams and aspirations, always putting herself in the back seat, just to make sure her children feel loved, cared for, and nourished.

The astonishing part is though, that none of these unsung heroes feel a sense of entitlement or ask for anything in return. It is the sense of duty and belongingness to the society that propels them to do what they do.

For millenia, human society has functioned on the principle of collectivity. An individual is always a part of something larger, and the collective good has overshadowed the individual good.

This can be seen also in the philosophical undertones of the East & West, be it the Oneness of Being of the Upanishads or the Collective Conscience of Rousseau and Durkheim. It is through altruistic acts for the larger good that the balance of "Samsara" is sustained. As Shri Krishna asks Arjuna to do Nishkama Karma without thinking about the fruits of his deed, so does Kant in his deontological ethics argue for duty for its own sake.

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Explicitly mention such points:

However, with the rise of individualism and materialism in the past century, the undercurrents of selflessness in the society somehow seem to be fading. While our ancestors found meaning of life in serving others, our generation is drifting towards "egoistic hedonism".

This can be seen in the "YOLO" (You Only Live Once) culture of Gen Z, where the only purpose of life is to maximize sensual and material pleasure.

Consumerism has become synonymous with success and flaunting, it has become a status symbol. It is perhaps the mindless capitalism of the postmodern era that has upended the traditional values shared by humanity universally.

The most visible consequence of this

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can be seen in the environmental crisis hanging over the Earth. While everyone seemingly cares about Nature, very few are willing to change their lifestyles and play an active role. Even the climate activists are busy in shifting responsibility onto the government and our forefathers, while they themselves continue with their lavish lives.

On the other hand, most governments are trying to find ways to "conquer the Nature" and maximize its output to serve their present needs, instead of bringing about a structural & societal transformation to address the root cause.

Another effect of this societal shift can also be seen in the Meaning Crisis plaguing today's generation. While they have

attained the pinnacle of material comfort, yet they feel hollow inside. The feeling of being alone & disconnected in an increasingly connected world is unfamiliar to none of us. But what is it that's missing? Why words like "depression, anxiety, therapy" are becoming ever more common?

Perhaps we have distanced ourselves from that very selfless service that sustained society and gave purpose to humanity. Perhaps we must go back to traditional wisdom in order to cure the existential maladies haunting our world today.

And for inspiration we have to look no further — there are shining examples of hope all around us. For instance, Jadav Payeng — the lone warrior who single-handedly turned

the barren island of Majuli into a lush thriving forest, one that gives refuge to thousands of plant and animal species.

Or Kallash Sahyarthi, who single-handedly restored the lost childhoods of countless children. These men may not feature on the lists of the world's richest or most powerful men, but society will remember them for centuries to come. And most importantly, they are a testament to the innate goodness that lies latent within every human being.

Today, most of us cannot leave our jobs or businesses and become philanthropists or social workers or environmental activists. But we can make conscious efforts and take small steps to ensure that we live

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our lives not just for our own good. These can be in the form of adoption of a sustainable lifestyle - cycling to work everyday, minimizing animal products, recycling clothes and plastics, etc., or it can be in the form of voluntary service to the local communities. In the end, every individual step by us results in a leap for the mankind - towards progress, prosperity, and purpose.

"Plant a tree and forget about it,
feed an animal, and give it shelter,
lend a helping hand to the one
in need,
and forget about it all,
for one day, years down the line,
in moments of sorrow & pain,
you will remember all of it,
and sleep peacefully."

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② "Revolutions are the locomotives
of history".

Yuval Harari in his masterpiece "Sapiens", traces humanity's history back to the Palaeolithic and its progression to the present age, which was fuelled by multiple "revolutions".

Humans as hunter-gatherers were simple beings — they would hunt and gather food only as much as needed for the day, and spend the rest of their time with their tribe in leisure. The lack of concept of surplus made sure that the various tribes remained largely peaceful, as greed had not yet crept into the society.

Then, somewhere around 12-15000 years ago, in what is today Anatolia & the "Fertile Crescent", humans slowly started learning the

Understanding - 30
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domestication of animals & plants. Animal rearing made milk & meat abundant, which helped humans to transition into a semi-nomadic lifestyle. But this also introduced concepts of 'wealth & power' to the mankind — those with more livestock emerged as more powerful, and cattle wars ensued between various tribes in a bid to accumulate power.

Subsequently, the domestication of wheat & barley brought about the Neolithic Revolution, which would change the course of history forever. The transition from nomadic hunters to semi-nomadic herdsmen to settled agriculturists was now complete. For the first time, the idea of "property" came about, and wars were now waged not for cattle, but for land.

With agricultural surplus, small tribes now transformed into large clans and the first nations took birth in Egypt, Mesopotamia,

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and the Indus Valley. This first revolution, would go on to shape many of our contemporary realities, including nation state, feudalism, capitalism, and many more.

Centuries down the line, when neolithic revolution had paved the way for the city states of Greece and Mahajanapadas of India, another revolution would take place, ~~that~~ changing the ways of human thought. This was the intellectual revolution spearheaded by Plato & Socrates in Greece, and Upanishads, Mahavira & Buddha in the East. Foundations of philosophy, logic, spirituality were laid down during this period of 6th - 4th centuries B.C.E. The roots of modern ideals of democracy, consciousness, rationalism & empiricism were

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sonn, which were revived during the period of Renaissance & Enlightenment in the 17th - 18th century Europe.

Thinkers like Hobbes & Rousseau would borrow from Plato to formulate theories of modern nation states & social contract.

Inspired by these ideals, the French Revolution would go on to become the locomotive that propelled history into modernity. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity threw away the old cloak of monarchy and became the foundational values of modern democracies.

Renaissance of medieval Europe, however, was not limited to the sociopolitical realm. It also inspired the modern rational scientific thought and heralded scientific revolutions by Copernicus, who rejected geo-centrism, Galileo,

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who rebelled against the dogmas of the Church, and Newton, who laid the cornerstone of modern physics & mathematics. Thus, it would not be an overstatement to say that modern technological climax sits on the shoulders of enlightenment-era thinkers.

Moving on in the avenues of history, we find another watershed moment in the early 19th century that continues to shape modern economies, that is the Industrial Revolution. Founded also on the Enlightenment ideals of Utilitarianism - happiness lies in the good of the maximum number of people, industrial revolution transformed traditional cottage industries, handicrafts, and feudal structures into large-scale mass production through machines.

However, as German philosopher Hegel famously said, every revolution progresses through a series of thesis & antithesis — Industrial

Revolution turned out to be an instrument of exploitation of the poor, where workers remained impoverished and the capitalist class or the bourgeoisie amassed fortunes.

In the backdrop of such widening disparities another German philosopher duo of Marx & Engels formulated the theory of communism, that dreamed of a utopian society where everyone would have equal access to resources. Their seminal work 'Das Kapital' sent shockwaves to the Europe of early 20th century, fuelling the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia, culminating in the 1st socialist nation of the world — USSR. Two world wars later, the world was

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divided into two poles - capitalist West and socialist East, and humanity the shadow of a Cold War between these two behemoths loomed large over the entire humanity.

But while class disparities were highlighted to the world through communism, gender disparities were still at large unspoken of. The 2nd world war saw a large mobilization of women into the workforce, and feminist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir first spoke of women's rights in the social, political, and economic spheres. This resulted in the 1st Feminist Revolution, which ultimately gave women an equal place in the political space. Subsequent feminist revolutions of 1980s and 2010s would go on to fight for women's rights in the social & economic realms.

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However, amidst these power struggles, humans had neglected and exploited the Nature to extreme. All these revolutions in one way or the other took place at the cost of the environment. Faced with the wrath of nature — natural calamities, skyrocketing temperatures, vanishing livelihoods, today we have come to realize that an ecological revolution is the need of the hour — one that places Nature, not humans, back at the centre stage. The innate tendency of humans to regard themselves as the zenith of all creation has on the one hand given rise to all these revolutions and so-called progress, but on the other hand it has also alienated us from the very environment that sustains us.

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Revolutions are indeed the locomotives of history, but we have paid heavily to build them and these locomotives have crushed many under their wheels.

Neolithic revolution came at the cost of our innate paleolithic way of life, where man and Nature lived in harmony and greed was absent.

French revolution caused the deaths of countless innocent people, and led to the imposition of western Enlightenment ideals onto the whole world.

Scientific revolution suppressed the spirituality within us, and made us look at the world with a sense of materialism, which can never give meaning to human life.

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Q.1 Industrial revolution was fuelled by colonialism which impoverished large parts of Asia and Africa for the sake of the West's prosperity. Also, it planted the seeds of deforestation, environmental exploitation, and cruelty towards animals, just in the name of production.

It reduced a human's value to mere "productivity" and deepened disparities in society, resulting in sociopolitical unrest.

Feminist revolution, though largely positive, has today taken some radical overtones and often ends up in villainization of men, which ultimately strengthens the divide instead of bridging it.

This leads us to question the very nature and necessity of revolutions - are they the only way to shape history?

The answer perhaps lies in Buddha's Anityavada, or theory of impermanance - the world is in a state of constant flux. But Buddha likens this constant change to a stream that gently flows on, and not to a revolutionary Tsunami.

Everything is indeed bound to change, but we must strike the fine balance between order and chaos, stability and revolution.

We must ensure that while history marches on towards greener pastures, no one is left behind and no one is crushed beneath.

As the Vedas teach us, the World is one Family, and the good of one lies in the good of all.

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