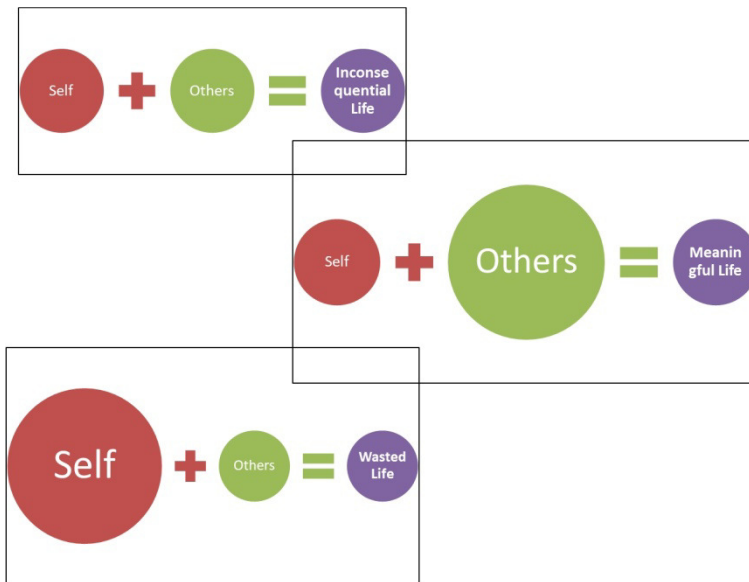


Meaningful Life



By

Saugata Nandi

Preface

Every life has a purpose. It's very important to recognize this and fulfil it. There is a difference between performing the duties and fulfilling the purpose of life. Let me take an example. Sudhir is the sole breadwinner for his family. Dutifully he supports his elderly parents, his wife and children. His entire focus is on ensuring all resources available are used productively for the benefit of his family members.

On the other hand Jassi also is in a similar situation. However he does things differently. Whenever possible he contributes his time and effort to volunteer for helping others. He has no surplus money available to offer due to his family commitments, yet he is eager to distribute relief, chop vegetables at the local community center and help in cooking for the needy. His family also joins in the effort whenever they can.

What is the difference in the approach of Jassi and Sudhir?

It's the perspectives that one has evolved towards self and others. When asked about their perspectives of life, Jassi said, 'I see myself and my family as a part of the community. If all of us are fine, we will be fine.' On the same query Sudhir stated, 'There is no one to provide for my family other than me. I have to earn enough for the current expenses and possible future challenges. If they pay me for my help, I will willingly provide.'

Though simple, this difference in perspectives is what leads to a meaningful life and a wasted life. Can every individual inspite of economic status lead a meaningful life? Is there a role that Government and society can play in ensuring that every individual can lead a meaningful life?

In this book, filled with documented examples, we will explore different perspectives related to self and others and how they interact to lead a meaningful life.

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Meaning of Life

Now at 72, Rakesh thought about his life. Born in an agricultural family his village was far away from where he stayed now. Life was simple then. However over time as unseasonal rains and unannounced dry spells, coupled with high costs of fertilisers and coercion by middlemen took his father's heart away from agriculture. The announcement of the factory was the last straw and they then parted with their land at a meagre compensation, as there were no registered government documents to prove that the land on which the family had been farming for over 30 years belonged to them.

Knowing nothing else to do, his father leased a piece of land and tried to grow wheat. The unseasonal hail storms damaged the entire crop, pushing the family in debt. Without any possession and with debt on them, the family moved to the nearby city in search of work. They could get some work in the factory and thus the agricultural family morphed into daily wagers.

Rakesh also delivered milk packets in the morning and went to school during the day. Soon the teachers realized that Rakesh was a very intelligent child and suggested to the parents to send him for further education at a mission in the large city nearby. With a heavy heart but filled with hope Rakesh was sent to the boarding school at a tender age of six. Only part of the tuition fees was to be paid by the parents.

As parents got busy with the stress and turmoil of their lives, the distance between Rakesh and them developed. Most of the children would have their parents visit them or send them gifts, but there was nothing coming for Rakesh. He stopped wanting to meet his parents and developed a deep angst towards them. He poured his heart into studies and excelled and after the toil for twelve years he finished school with a full scholarship into a good engineering college.

His parents by then had lost track of him and neither did Rakesh go back to find out anything about them. His life was spent studying and then after the five years of engineering, he got a job in a very good company. A steady income and a promise of a good life came along with it. A few years later he got married, arranged by his colleagues and friends.

Dedication to the job, his hard work and intelligence stood Rakesh in good stead. He went home and found out his aged parents and started sending them sufficient money so that they need not work as daily wagers anymore. He fulfilled his duties as best as he could.

A chance encounter with Rakesh evolved into friendship and he narrated his life story to me. He told, 'I don't know why the government needs to give bailout to farmers. I have gone ahead just based on hard work.'

'But then the fact was that you got an opportunity that seldom people get. Is there any reason that the opportunity was given to you only,' I asked.

'I stayed alone from the age of six. Even if I had fever, the monks would send me to the dispensary and I was to take care of myself. They oversaw but then I never had love and care my whole life. I have only worked and provided for others,' he elaborated

'Everyone does not have the kind of will power and determination. All want good jobs but many do not get the opportunity,' I pursued.

'My son is now in Canada. I could pay for his education. It's again due to my money,' he pursued.

'I agree, but that was your duty as a parent,' I dug on

'Duty, I have done. Look at my son. He does not even come over unless there is some reason. Being with parents is not a reason at all for him to come home. Even after doing so much for him. I studied in a free school and I had to spend over fifty lakhs for his education. I keep reminding him that,' said Rakesh

'When you have three flats and good investments, why don't you give the surplus to the farmers who are in need. Many are committing suicide due to the poverty,' I asked

'I always pay my taxes. If the money is not reaching where it is supposed to, hold the Government and the officials responsible. I have nothing to do there. I have never been corrupt and will never be,' Rakesh argued.

'As age catches up, ultimately where do you see you and your wife to be,' I asked.

'I am a very planned person. I have kept enough money aside for old age homes. I have found out a few already and visited them also. One in Coimbatore is the one I like a lot. Even after all the expenses I should have a few crores left over. For fifteen years of my career I was employed at Saudi Arabia and that is where I earned very well,' added Rakesh. 'And when both of us are no more, the money will go to my son.'

'That sounds well thought out. Why still don't you think that a bit can be donated for the poor,' I asked

'I was born poor, but I am where I am. Let others do that too. Rest let Government stop corruption and things will be better. I will never donate as it robs a person off the desire to work hard.' Rakesh added.

'In a way are you not agreeing that your father did the right thing by letting you go to the hostel. Then why didn't you ask them to stay with you,' I pursued

'My parents only did away with their responsibility. I am not against the hostel, but they never came to meet me. Never sent sweets. Even clothes were the ones donated by others that I would wear. The monks gave me a little money if I did some work. Such a painful childhood is what I got from my parents,' said Rakesh

'Coffee,' I offered.

'Sure, let me pay for it,' said Rakesh

While sipping the coffee, I glanced at the newspaper. One of the articles was the one below:

A 75-year-old woman in Odisha who begs for a living has donated Rs 5,000 of her savings to the Chief Minister's Relief Fund in their fight against Covid-19 pandemic.

Sarojini Das, resident of Ekatala village in Rajkanika block, went to the BDO's office on Tuesday and donated her savings to BDO DS Subhadarshi Joshi as her contribution to CMRF for the fight against corona pandemic. Das, a widow, also donated Rs 2,000 to the local press club that is providing cooked food to the poor and destitute people in the locality.

The BDO (Block Development Office) said Das has set an example for other people of the state by her selfless act.

"She said she was moved by the plight of several other people going hungry during the lockdown. After she came to know about the state government's appeal to people to donate money to fight the pandemic, she decided to donate the money," he said. The woman lost her husband a decade ago.

Incidentally, in October last year Das had donated Rs 50,001 from her old age pension and savings to the Jagannath Temple corpus at Puri. The BDO said that she had a patch of land which she had sold off 5-6 years ago and kept the money. "As she has no children, she did not use the money. She probably donated the money to the Jagannath temple from that amount," he said.

When asked what the state government would do for Das, the BDO said the government would think about it.

Das has no children and ekes out her living by begging in the locality and sleeps in a room of the Jagulaipada grampanchayat office. Incidentally, after the grampanchayat office was turned into a quarantine centre, the woman was forced to look for shelter in other places.

Subhransu Sutar, a member of the local press club, said Das always remains happy even during adversity. "Even when she has to beg for food, she thinks of others going hungry," said Sutar.

<https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/75-yr-old-woman-beggar-in-odisha-donates-rs-5-000-for-fighting-against-covid-19-pandemic/story-sZH0hUnpOwNnTR4NBddQLK.html>

I stood confused. I tried to understand Rakesh's behaviour and contrast it with Sarojini Das and found it hard to decipher the difference. In one case a person refuses to part with even the surplus, while in the other the person gives away whatever she had.

Most often a person gives away an opportunity to achieve the meaning of his life, consciously.

Recognizing the Meaning – It Finds a Way to You

The world waited with a bated breath in June and July 2018, as the Thai cave rescue carried on to get twelve children and their coach out of a flooded cave.

British Cave Rescue Council divers Richard Stanton and John Volanthen, duly assisted by Thai Navy Seals and several other administration representatives made the first contact and eventually led the rescue of the team.

Volanthen's voice is that heard on a widely broadcast video of the first contact with the soccer team, saying "How many of you?" When he learned that all the missing people were accounted for, he replied, "Brilliant."

After locating and participating in the rescue of the missing team and its coach, Stanton said that he and the other cave divers involved were not heroes, saying, "We're just using a very unique skill set, which we normally use for our own interest and sometimes we're able to use that to give something back to the community."

Stanton went on to say that the purpose of his life was perhaps to learn this skill and save these children.

Life is one of the biggest puzzles that one has to solve. In the day job is interlaced the purpose. It keeps on presenting itself once a while. However, it's on to the individual to recognize it and choose to act or to ignore. At times it's a small nudge and the ball is set on to motion.

Consider the following message from the website www.akshayapatra.org

Looking out of a window, one day in Mayapur, a village near Calcutta, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada saw a group of children fighting with stray dogs over scraps of food. From this simple, yet heart-breaking incident was born a determination that no child within a radius of ten miles from our centre should go hungry.

His inspiring resolve sowed the seeds of The Akshaya Patra Foundation. With the vision: "No child in India shall be deprived of education because of hunger," Akshaya Patra started the Mid-Day Meal Programme in June 2000 by serving mid-day meals to 1,500 children across five government schools in Bengaluru, Karnataka.

A humble beginning, yet, the initial days of implementing the programme was not a smooth sail. Soon came the helping hands of Mohandas Pai, who took the initiative of donating the first vehicle to transport food to the schools; and Abhay Jain, who promised to bring in more donors to contribute for the further expansion of the programme.

In partnership with the Government of India and various State Governments, as well as philanthropic donors; the organisation is running the world's largest Mid-Day Meal Programme. Built on a Public-Private Partnership model, Akshaya Patra combines good management, innovative technology, and smart engineering to deliver nutritious and hygienic school lunch on every school day.

The small nudge by the two men mentioned Mohandas Pai and Abhay Jain, gave the who initiative a direction and scale that seldom one can imagine to reach so soon.

Depending on the available resources with the individual, whether it be money or knowledge or capability or time or contacts, one can be in a position to lend a hand in a timely manner, that supports another individual. This act when done in a selfless manner, without expecting any return, gives rise to immense satisfaction.

The purpose for which the individual gained the experiences comes in front of the individual at least thrice in the life time. The individual has to learn to recognize it and then make time for doing that. The template for life that is presented as earn a living and save for the future is flawed and it puts money at the center of all things.

Often we have therefore heard people in their deathbeds saying that one should try to live a meaningful life rather than a life in pursuit of wealth and pleasure. Isn't it a bit too late for such a realization?

Individuals who get to generate a lot of wealth or power also need to find out the right purpose and utilise it. Else either the wealth gets squandered away or it will lead to destruction. It's not about philanthropic announcements or CSR investments. It's about generating the deep realization on why the wealth or power came at the first place and then utilizing it appropriately.

History is testimony to instances like the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution or the Independence struggle of nations where those in power faulted to a great extent and had to pay dearly for the same. Those who consider wealth and power as entitlement suffer a rude realization at some point of time or the other.

The rising income inequality is witness to the fact that those in power are displaying a tendency to accumulate rather than redistribute. Little do they realise at that moment, that when they are at the fag end of their lives, there will be ultimately nothing that was amassed which can be taken with them.

On the other hand, those who have nothing, little do they realise that the struggle to earn two square meals a day was provided to them. At the same time, the path to overcome that struggle would also be provided to them but it's for the individual to see the path and walk the path that was emerging. When they shut off those paths due to any reason the ability to earn also gets squandered.

Consider a teenager who stays in a slum and has no particular ambition. He does odd jobs and wants to sit in an air-conditioned office working on computers. At the same moment a representative from a large company holds a camp to recruit youngsters for jobs in automobile repair. To the teenager that is not what he wants to do and lets it go. His friend enrolls for the automobile repair training camp and after a year gets placed as a mechanic in a workshop.

He then further goes on to complete a diploma and over years takes a loan and starts an engine repair and servicing shop of his own, while employing three people. The teenager who wanted to learn computers was still struggling and had become a delivery boy with a leading ecommerce company.

The meaning for your life finds a way to you, but you will have to recognise it by going with the flow.

Ego – Loss of Meaning

'This is my fourth house', announced a proud Ajay during the housewarming party. Everyone cheered him and wished that he will have the fifth one soon. Born in a small town in Uttarakhand, Ajay grew up as a child in a very small house. His sister who would always do significantly better than him was the pride of the family. She became a corporate success and started investing into houses as a long term strategy. They had three flats. So Ajay had to have one more.

Though unsaid everyone knew that Ajay had painful memories of his childhood. From getting the affection of his mother, to getting some space in the small house, to doing better than his sister in academics. All of these could not happen and in turn Ajay decided to become a CEO of a company in a very short span and worked relentlessly towards it. He did become a CEO at the young age of 35. A significant accomplishment for him as he could finally become the pride of the family. His parents lauded his achievements.

His relentless pursuit for more of everything became second nature and he would spend time with only those who could benefit him in some way. Rest all were a waste of time to him. A go-getter soon he rose to head large organization and was posted overseas, excelling in his work. Around him were only those who could help him reach greater heights, though he took care of those who worked hard and helped him succeed.

His wife would network with the other influential women and helped Ajay by getting some information of the big investments that were going to be made by other companies making Ajay stay ahead always. Winning was a way of life for Ajay, till his wife was struck down by cancer. He poured in all the money and flew her to the US for treatment, but she could not survive.

As he tried to reason out the stroke of destiny, he realised that for the past year, his wife had been sick, he organized all the material things for her, but did not spend time being with her. He had taken it for granted that the best of the doctors would definitely be able to get his wife cured of the disease. He realised that he had taken things a bit too much for granted all this while. He always wanted to take his wife for a world tour, something that she really wanted to go for, and now that she was no more, deep guilt overtook Ajay.

He did not know why he was leading such a fast life anymore. What was he trying to achieve? Why was he trying to achieve whatever he was?

Super 30

In 2002, Abhayanand and Anand Kumar started Super 30 with the plan to select 30 talented students from economically impoverished sections who could not afford IIT coaching. These 30 students were then prepared to pass IIT-JEE examinations. Anand Kumar's mother, Jayanti Devi, volunteered to cook for the students while Anand Kumar, Abhayanand, and other teachers tutored them. The students were also provided study materials and lodging for a year free of cost.

In the first year of the coaching, 18 out of 30 students made it to IIT. The following year, application numbers soared due to the popularity of the program and written examination was conducted to select 30 students. In 2004, 22 out of 30 students qualified for IIT-JEE, increasing the popularity of the program which attracted even more applications.

In 2005, 26 out of 30 students cleared the IIT-JEE exam, while 28 in 2006 - this despite the fact that IIT changed the examination structure. In appreciation of their efforts, Bihar Chief Minister at the time Nitish Kumar congratulated the students with a cash prize of ₹50,000 each.

The following year 28 more students cleared the IIT-JEE, and in 2008, all of the Super 30 students cleared the IIT-JEE, after which Abhayanand quit Super 30 saying "the experiment is over." Some of Kumar's former students joined as Super 30 teachers and in 2009 and 2010 all 30 students again qualified the IIT JEE exams. In subsequent years the success rates from the 30 students were: 2011 (24 passed), 2012 (27 passed), 2013 (28 passed), 2014 (27 passed), 2015 (25 passed), and in 2016 (28 passed). In 2017, all Super 30 candidates made it to the IIT-JEE. In 2018, 26 of the 30 students cleared the exam.

Why do some people dedicate their lives to others, while some are never able to give enough to themselves?

Ego is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.

Exploiting Others – Loss of Meaning

Rudra wanted to grow in the corporate ladder. However, he wanted to grow by hook or crook and by using his uncanny people skills and ability to manipulate to his advantage. Through a stroke of luck he got a job in a growing sector. The company grew by leaps and bounds and alongwith it did Rudra. There were many subordinates who despised him as he was exceptionally rude to them and overworked them. But Rudra kept growing in the company, not really by virtue of his work, rather by being at the right place at the right time.

Three things will make you successful, he would say. 'Do only those things that make the top management feel good about having you around, even if it means booking hotels for them? Also, never take up any job that is about generating revenue, pick up one that is around cost and that way you can spend doing only those things that make the boss happy. And lastly, send emails at odd hours especially when you are marking the boss on it as that will mean you work harder than anyone else.'

As Rudra grew faster, he became more aggressive and arrogant. No one who had a choice would like to report to him. Though he would make it a point to remember the birthdays, anniversaries and send greetings to the team members on those days. 'Again posturing,' said his team members. His peers were totally disgruntled as he would showcase at every instance that he was the hardest worker. Before the team meetings, he would deliberately send a presentation late at night and then remark that obviously other have not read it, though I have worked hard and created it.

And then the day came when Rudra retired from the company. He was financially very sound but no one came to meet him, call him or even correspond with him in any way. His family members also shifted away and he sat alone in a large house with no one even reaching out. He asked his boss to take him on as a consultant to the firm where he had given over thirty five years of service, but then there was no response.

I used to be so busy everyday with multiple engagements, what is going on now. Why am I so lonely and feeling miserable? Am I useless, all of a sudden? He thought of throwing a retirement party at his place, but all his team members and peers just pulled off some excuse saying that they were busy on the Saturday evening. He thought to himself, 'Maybe I worked so hard that I forgot to make friends along the way.'

He was an outcast, a landless labourer who had to trek across an entire mountain every day, just to reach the farm that he worked on. It was a treacherous trek, and led to accidents often. His people needed help, there were lives at stake every day. He decided, if no one would help his people, he would. Then, without pausing for a thought, he went ahead and did just that with his bare hands.

Like all the Musahar men, Dashrath Manjhi worked on the other side of the mountain. At noon, his wife Phaguni would bring his lunch. As they had no road, the trek took hours over the mountain. Dashrath tilled fields for a landlord on the other side. He would quarry stone. And in a few hours from then, he would be tired and hungry.

Phaguni, Dashrath's wife, prepared for her treacherous climb up the mountain. She wrapped the 'rotis', filled a container with a thin curry, and bundled the food into a square of cloth. She picked a small pot of water, and hoisted it on her head. Her children sat playing by their hut in the small Musahar settlement in the mountain's shadow.

He would watch and wait for Phaguni. That day, she would come to him empty handed, injured. As the harsh sun beat down, Phaguni tripped on loose rock, and was badly injured. Her water pot shattered. She slid down several feet, injuring her leg. Hours past noon, she limped to her husband. He was angry at her for being late.

But on seeing her tears, he made a decision. He decided that he was not going to wait for anyone to solve his problems, he was going to do-it-himself. Dashrath bought a hammer, chisel, and crowbar. He had to sell his goats, which meant a lower income for his family. He climbed to the top, and started chipping away at the mountain. Years later, he would recount, then, Phaguni fell ill. The doctor was in Wazirganj, which stood just on the other side of the mountain, but the road leading to it was 75 kilometers long. Unable to make the journey, she passed away. Her death not only enraged him more, it spurred him on.

It was not an easy task. He would often get hurt by the rocks falling from the unyielding mountain. He would rest and then start again. At times, he helped people carry their things over the mountain for a small fee, money to feed his children. After 10 years, as Manjhi chipped away, people saw a cleft in the mountain and some came to help.

Manjhi broke through that last thin wall of rock, and walked into the other side of the mountain. After 22 years, Dashrath Das Manjhi, the common man, the landless laborer, had broken the mountain: he had carved out a road 360 feet long, 30 feet wide. Wazirganj, with its doctors, jobs, and school, was now only 5 kilometers away. People from 60 villages in Atri could use his road. Children had to walk only 3 kilometers to reach school. Grateful, they began to call him 'Baba', the revered man.

But Dashrath did not stop there. He began knocking on the Government's doors, asking for the road to be tarred and connected to the main road. He did the unthinkable to get the government's attention, he walked along the railway line all the way to New Delhi, the capital. He submitted a petition there, for his road, for a hospital for his people, a school and water. In July 2006, Dashrath went to the then Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's 'Junta Durbar'. The minister, overwhelmed, got up and offered 'Baba' his chair, his minister's seat; a rare honor for a man of Manjhi's social status.

Why is it that some people are more sensitive to the pain and plight of others than others? What makes this so acute that a person decides to get up and do something about it – whether it be against the prevailing way things work or whether it be doing something for the first time.

This isn't about fulfilling the dream. It's about not accepting the status quo because others do not see things the way you do. The urge to put it into action and at times with sheer courage only and nothing else.

Such people are not daunted by the task at hand. They do not reason and just get to work, but with a very clear goal.

At times it's good not to think too much because often the end does not seem to justify the means, but at the end of it, maybe it did.

The tendency to exploit others for your own advantage is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.

Relentless Pursuit of Accumulation – Loss of Meaning

Bhanupriya was obsessed with gold. Every occasion she would buy gold, every bit of money saved she would buy gold. Over time her gold in the lockers was valued for over ten crores. She would still keep accumulating and never selling. The family stayed in a small rented house. Children went to government schools though they could have afforded far better ones.

After being asked incessantly by her children she said, 'I was born in a very rich family. My father lost all his land and wealth due to his tendency to gamble. By the time I was eight years old, we had to give away all our land and house and live in the servant's quarter of our own house. Constant harassment was faced by us. I had decided that I will ensure that there is very little money at home always so that there is no chance of anyone going into gambling.'

'But what will you do with all this gold,' asked her husband. 'In spite of earning well, we still don't have a house of our own. I cannot tell people about this behaviour of yours. But everyone thinks that we are misers,' he added.

'Let them say. When my father used to give money to others, everyone was happy to receive it. When he was in debt, no one came forward to help him. Remember no one gives you money and therefore you have to take care of yourself,' said Bhanupriya.

'But then why hoard so much,' asked her husband.

'So that when we are old, we need not seek alms like beggars. Also I am keeping a constant watch on our original farmlands. The family owning it is under distress. I have sent a message asking them to sell all of our sixty five acres and the house back to us for eight crores. We will be rich again,' said Bhanupriya

'Ultimately it's the gold value being translated into the farmhouse. You are rich now itself. Why don't you feel like that,' asked her husband. 'Don't you realise that we have all led an unnecessarily difficult life due to this obsession of yours.'

'All my life every night I have dreamt of being the owner of that farm and house. It's the sole purpose of my life and I will achieve it,' said Bhanupriya

'It's not a purpose, its madness,' said her husband and then he walk off in a whiff.

Consider the story of Rajkishore Swami will not only shock you but inspire you as well. A resident of Sitamarhi district, Swami donated the piece of land of his house for building a school and is now spending his days in the footpath. Swami is not someone owns immense wealth, yet he took this initiative because of his positivity surrounding education. Despite having led a life of utter poverty, he donated his land so that a school could be built on it. His only aim was to educate children so that they prosper in life.

Rajkishore now sells daily needful to lead his life. Neither Rajkishore is educated nor is he a very wealthy man but his views surrounding education surpasses these barriers. The land that he donated is now used for the High school which accommodates at least 400 children. Rajkishore cannot use his legs but this has not let down his spirits who sells vermillion, bindi and other needful to survive.

Though Rajkishore has two sons, both of them are differently abled and cannot help him in earn for the family. But their wives help as much as possible. Dharampur did not have school for their children and when it was proposed to build a school, people refused to give away their lands. It was then that Rajkishore donated his part of the land for building the school.

Rajkishore, 50, says it gives him immense pleasure to see the children of the village go to school.

<https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/shocking-this-man-donated-land-for-building-school-in-his-village-bihar-now-lives-on-footpath-watch-video/886873/>

A tendency to accumulate is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.

Arrogance – Loss of Meaning

A requirement for clean available land title without any encroachments was a fundamental ask from the industry. However, it was not really that easy to get. Several laws over the years provided entitlements to landless farmers and the land registration records went missing for large periods of time. Leave aside the legal title disputes. At times no one really knew the really owner of a large parcel of land, other than the farmer tilling it.

Corporations wanting to setup factories used the services of Gaurdas to secure clean land title. 'Things are not that easy,' said Gaurdas. 'My job is to find out the last known owners of the land from the registration office and then provide them a lucrative deal to give up their land. If a good deal is given, they are not an issue. Very often the tenant farmer is the one who gets displaced and for them the company provides job to a family member. This area is an arid one and it's a waste of effort trying to do farming here. I basically try hard to drive a win-win deal.'

However, at the ground level Gaurdas was a feared goon. Farmers at times ran away to the nearby forests fearing harassment from him. He got the agreements signed by hook or crook. Allegations were levied that he got the farmers and land owners to give up their land on gun point and using coercion. There were over two hundred police complaints against him and seven being of murder.

When asked he would say casually, 'Once I am entrusted with a job, I have to get it done systematically. If there is anyone at fault, it's those corporate houses who want the land. You tell me is the butcher at fault or the customer at fault.'

Over time he built quite a lot of wealth and started his own factories. However, as his means was dubious, so was his ends. He met with a fatal accident and was reduced to a vegetative state for the rest of his life. In the villages the farmers celebrated on hearing the news.

Contrast this with Rajendras water revolution.

Alwar district, which once had a grain market, was at the time largely dry and barren, as years of deforestation and mining had led to a dwindling water table, minimal rainfall followed by floods. Another reason was the slow abandoning of traditional water conservation techniques, like building check dams, or johad, instead villagers started relying on "modern" bore wells, which simply sucked the groundwater up. But consistent use meant that these bored wells had to be dug deeper and deeper within a few years, pushing underground water table further down each time, till they went dry in ecologically fragile Aravalis.

At this point he met a village elder, Mangu Lal Meena, who argued "water was a bigger issue to address in rural Rajasthan than education". He chided him to work with his hands rather than behaving like "educated" city folks who came, studied and then went back; later encouraged him to work on a johad, earthen check dams, which have been traditionally used to store rainwater and recharge groundwater, a technique which had been abandoned in previous decades.

As a result, the area had no ground water since previous five years and was officially declared a "dark zone". Though Rajendra wanted to learn the traditional techniques from local farmers about

water conservation, his other city friends were reluctant to work manually and parted ways. Eventually with the help of a few local youths he started desilting the Gopalpura johad, lying neglected after years of disuse. When the monsoon arrived that year, the johad filled up and soon wells which had been dry for years had water. Villagers pitched in and in the next three years, it made it 15 feet deep.

These facilitated a rise in the groundwater levels and helped turn the area into a "white zone". So much so that the Forest Department invited the NGO to take an active part in the park's management.

Arrogance blinds an individual and is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.

Living for Self – Loss of Meaning

Ritwik was unhappy with his grades. He said, 'I came first in class but the person who was second was only twenty five marks behind me. This is not good enough. I need more marks.' He went on to secure a place in the foremost engineering college in the country. To which he said, 'But I still got the second best department, not the first one.'

A very driven, diligent and intelligent person, at the age of twenty two, he started a company with an innovative idea. After running it for five years he could not sustain it and had to shutter it down. He decided to learn business management so that in the next venture he would be successful. He got admission in the finest college in the country. To which he said, 'So what. Many others got in too and some with much lesser grades than me. If I had a bit more money I would have gone to the best college in the world.'

After graduating he went on to build his career and got an opportunity as a business head. To which he said, 'At my age guys are CEOs and are millionaires. I am still in a day job with a company. If I am working for someone then I must be a CEO.'

A series of job hops and he landed as a CEO in the next five years. To which he said, 'What's the point of being a CEO of a 400 Crores company. I want to lead a 25000 Crores organization.' And his search continued. When I last met him when he was contemplating a startup once again while also planning to meet a business magnate who was running a huge conglomerate.

Compare this with Dr. Anil Kumar Malhotra and Pamela Malhotra who started the SAI (Save Animals Initiative) Sanctuary Trust.

Dr. Anil Kumar Malhotra and Pamela Malhotra came south to start the SAI (Save Animals Initiative) Sanctuary Trust. They bought around 55 acres of unused and abandoned land from the farmers who were not using it due to excess of rainfall in Kodagu district of Karnataka. They kept buying lands from farmers who were not using them. The land was used and farmers got money to repay their debts as their land was idle. Gradually the 55 acre forest cover became larger and today covers 300 acres of the land. There were a lot of native trees there. The couple decided to retain those and follow three rules: no chopping down trees, no human interference and no poachers.

The wildlife sanctuary started in 1991. After 23 years, they had transformed the 55 acres of barren land they bought in 1991 into a 300 acre sanctuary with a river that is home to fish and snakes, including the King Cobra. The huge trees and thick forest helped several birds like the hornbill find their homes. There are over 300 species of birds that visit this sanctuary. Several cameras are installed across the sanctuary to identify new animals and keep a track on poachers.

When the Malhotra couple purchased the land, there were already native species of cardamom and other trees that were planted. They planted more native trees around these. As the tree cover expanded, the animal and bird species increased. The flora includes hundreds of varieties of indigenous trees.

The couple grow 10-12 acres of coffee and around 15 acres of cardamom. They are involved in organic farming. The sanctuary is off-grid and it runs completely on solar and alternate energy.

As the area is very large it is hard to keep track of the poachers. To counter this, they spread awareness about preserving wildlife and nature in schools and nearby villages. The wildlife on their sanctuary includes Bengal Tigers, Asian Elephants, Hyena, Wild Boar, Leopards, Sambhar, and the giant Malabar squirrel.

Living for self only and turning a blind eye towards anything else is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.

Evolving Self – Meaningful Life

Many people come into our lives, some stay, some go but all are sent with a purpose. It's important to evolve self constantly to understand the purpose. No one will evolve you, it's your role to do so to yourself.

Human kind is blessed with a machine that even best cannot design. It's the human body – a self-regulating, mobile and thinking machine. It is on to every individual to nurture the body and mind, figure out the pieces of the puzzle of life and lead a meaningful life.

As it's said, there is enough in the world for everyone's need, but not everyone's greed.

The people mentioned ahead in this book have evolved self and led a meaningful life. They could have as well criticized fate and complained, rather than doing something about it. A simple thought but it can redefine life.

What can I do to improve the life of others?

Whether it's the role of a scientist or a businessman or a politician or an employee or a homemaker, this one thought can change the your approach radically.

However, to reach there, a precondition exists. A deep sense of belongingness and understanding that everything is ultimately interconnected and your hard work is as important as anyone else and that is why everyone has a machine (own body) that is no different than one another's.

This needs to be better understood. A businessman can say that he employees people and carries out CSR and therefore he is doing whatever is necessary. However, if anyone has resources beyond what is necessary, then the individual is losing the opportunity to make an impact on the lives of others, by not deploying those excess resources productively.

An obese individual who eats food equivalent of three people is therefore impacting his health negatively.

The repercussion is integral in the action.

Just like the obese person, there are many instances where an individual stops from evolving self by telling lies to pacify self and developing 'what can happen if' scenarios. As the world churns out stories where the more the better is endorsed, there are many who sit back and silently disagree, and a few who act against the thought also.

Dominance, success, prosperity rubs shoulders with suppression, conspiracy and hunger. It does not seem to impact directly as these are separated by hundreds of kilometres and being faced by a different group of people. However the connect is omnipresent.

An evolved individual is one who has developed an understanding of this and works to establish a connect to help others with whatever excess the individual has. While companies come and go, institutions built based on the concept of 'improving the lives of others', always sustain over time.

If one can evolve from serving self to serving others, in a disproportionately large way then it goes from living a wasted life to an inconsequential life to a meaningful life. It's all about making the right set of choices at the right time. Such opportunities or real test presents itself from time to time and one has to recognise it and rise up and beyond to it.

For instance in the case of Oskar Schindler made famous by Steven Spielberg's film "Schindler's List", showed how the factory owner saved 1,200 Jews from World War II concentration camps. Now the true story — both heroic and human — of Schindler and his wife, Emilie, is detailed in an exhibit at Pellissippi State Community College.



Spielberg's black-and-white film plays quietly in a corner of the college's Bagwell Center for Media and Art Gallery. Shown on a series of wall panels of photographs, maps and text, the exhibit created in Germany goes beyond what viewers of the 1993 film showcased.

For more than 5½ years, Oskar and Emilie Schindler risked their lives to save 1,200 Jews from what the exhibit says was certain death within Nazi concentration camps. The couple saved Jewish workers in their factory first in Krakow, Poland, and later in what's now the Czech Republic.

Spielberg's award-winning movie focused on Oskar Schindler. Emilie's work became better known in the 1990s after author Erika Rosenberg wrote her biography.

The exhibit at Pellissippi details the Schindlers' lives before, during and after the war, including their 1927 marriage and their post-war separation. But the display illustrates clearly how one or two individuals made a life-and-death difference to many.

Good from evil

"This exhibit reminds us that good can come from evil. And that we can stand up as individuals to evil where it exists," Amanda Carr-Wilcoxson, a history instructor at Pellissippi, said.

The Czech-born Schindler "was nothing if not a complicated man," Carr-Wilcoxson said. He saved Jews who worked in his factory yet that factory made armaments for the Nazis, she said. While he saved Jews from death camps, Schindler was an early supporter of Adolf Hitler, Carr-Wilcoxson said. And as he worked with his wife to save others, he "wasn't the most faithful husband," she said.

The exhibit sets the Schindlers' story in the context of Europe before and during the Nazi occupation. It also recalls poignant personal moments, noting that Oskar Schindler and Emilie Pelzl fell immediately in love when they met.

It details how Oskar Schindler often bribed Nazis with money and once with diamonds to save Jews. It includes an illustration of the first two of the 19-page "Schindler's List" of the names of Jewish workers Schindler said were needed in his factory and so saved from concentration camps.

The exhibit tells of Oskar Schindler's wish that the story of suffering and liberation of "his Jews" become a major Hollywood film and how two efforts to achieve that dream failed. At one point, he spent two weeks in a 1963 meeting with "Casablanca" screenwriter Howard Koch. Koch's screenplay, finished two years later, was never filmed.

The Schindler exhibit is at Pellissippi, 10915 Hardin Valley Road, through Oct. 6. Gallery hours are 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Admission is free. Co-hosted by the Tennessee Consortium for International Studies, the exhibit will tour six other Tennessee locations.

The exhibit ends by asking viewers to stop to reflect.

"It asks you to think about how evil happens and how you as a member of society are able to go against evil, and why you should," Carr-Wilcoxson said. "It's powerful, important and very timely."

<https://www.knoxnews.com/story/life/2017/09/28/schindlers-list-story-told-exhibit-pellissippi-state/676847001/>

When Oscar Schindler was presented with the opportunity, he rose up to the occasion rather than letting it pass by. And that is why he is remembered.

Role of the Government and Society

What role can the government play in all of this? How can the Government make policies that encourage individuals to work for the benefit of others? Would a policy measure risk the possibility of not rewarding hard work?

These questions need to be answered in the context of the country and the economic policies that are being pursued. There are two conflicting thoughts here - give the man a fish or teach him fishing. Government needs to follow a policy that encourages the latter therefore.

Such a policy framework needs to ensure all citizens of essentials and then provide with adequate capability development and livelihood opportunities. The urge of humans to seek power and go higher up will drive the individuals to do better constantly.

The government can therefore provide food, education, healthcare, vocational training, livelihood aligned to the vocation. Once these are in place, the further opportunities of higher education and higher positions will motivate individuals to do better. And those citizens who are trying to do new things are ensured of a safety net in case they fall. This encourages risk taking and thereby generation of wealth over a prolonged period of time.

As science and technology advances the government must also constantly keep the advancements going. Any sort of stagnation in any of the processes related to improvement of quality and quantity must be immediately looked into and resolved.

Thus it requires governments to work in a different way than crisis based or adhoc allocation to a systems and process based approach. The entire process is not complex, though it's not simple either.

For instance, the key processes can be broken down into four large chunks:

1. Citizen quotient – ever increasing quality of health, education and livelihood for all; extreme ease of living
2. National quotient – secure nation with pristine ecosystem and cruelty free life for all beings
3. International quotient – strong global connections to ensure significant value added contribution to the developed nations and the world
4. Future quotient – maintenance of existing soft and hard infrastructure, and leading in research and capability development through institutions to be future ready in every area

All the experts and departments can then work in an integrative manner to deliver on those processes with constant improvement and allocations made accordingly.

Sufficient guidelines can be provided so that the excess wealth beyond a certain point is necessarily invested into new businesses or for government infrastructure funds. As the quality of the essentials increase, the overall capability of the workforce increases thereby creating an upward spiral.

The other aspect is how to ensure that the workforce stays engaged and does not tend to become lazy. This can be done by other mechanisms like withdrawal of immediate and long term benefits like retirals in case of capable and not engaged workforce. The workforce even post retirement

must be engaged in nation building activities like child education, village redevelopment, water resources harvesting and other socially relevant initiatives. These activities are to be allocated and performed to building a stronger nation.

Much needs to be seen if collective move like that of a government will do any good, or is this going to be all about individuals who decide to just do something about 'what does not seem right'?

Every citizen must lead a meaningful life. It is simply an interplay of orientation towards self and orientation towards others.

Those who lead a life focused more on self and less on others, lead a wasted life; those who are neither focused on self or on others and roll along life, lead an inconsequential life; and those who focus more on others and less on self, lead a meaningful life.

Daily Reminder – Pin it Up

Leading a meaningful life and a life with purpose is one that an individual is proud of. Such an individual does not repent during the final hours and is blessed by the nature, having achieved destiny. A quick recap of the learning from the writeup below is provided below.

- Most often a person gives away an opportunity to achieve the meaning of his life, consciously.
- The meaning for your life finds a way to you, but you will have to recognise it by going with the flow.
- Ego is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.
- The tendency to exploit others for your own advantage is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.
- A tendency to accumulate is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.
- Arrogance blinds an individual and is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.
- Living for self only and turning a blind eye towards anything else is one of the fundamental reasons for not being able to lead a meaningful life.

Pin it up prominently, so that you can take a quick glance at it every day.

About the Book

Rising inequalities and the stress on the ecosystem needs everyone to realise and act for the good of the home that we all share – our Earth. One simple way is to contribute by leading a life focused on vital few important things only. Soon, one would realise that most of the essential things are available for free or at a very low cost – air, water, food, clothing and shelter.

However, the insatiable need for more, has harmed the very home we live in and we continue doing so. As a consequence we have brought structured ruthlessness on the ecosystem and now that is eating into mankind too.

Complete with potential unlimited, the man has focused on causing harm to many rather than use the capability to spread peace and happiness for all. More pollution is being created, more animals are killed, more trees are cut and more harmful chemicals are being released into the air and in the water.

It's time to look into the true meaning of life and a great reset is needed from society, government, organizations and institutions to make this change ONCE AGAIN. This book urges all to focus on the fundamentals of leading a meaningful life – one that is for the Others, and it all begins from SELF.

About the Author

Saugata Nandi is an author and entrepreneur. He is a part of two companies METL Global Perspectives www.metl.in and Yancha Positive Parenting www.yancha.in. He believes that every person gets sufficient opportunities to convert his or her life into a meaningful one and must realise it and do so. The interplay between self and others is an important one to be understood and through this book an attempt is made in that direction.

Do you want to know more....and discuss on this theme? Contact the author Saugata Nandi, saugata@metl.in, www.metl.in