
The Typical Unrest of Modern / Current / Contemporary Times: A Study
Debabrata Adhikary

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Abstract: The Endeavour of the present paper is to look at the conceptualization of time in present / current / contemporary scenario, and how should we view it. In a time, when the need for ‘more’, and ‘latest’ has become the norm, whether in terms of money, property, commodity, facts, information, facilities, and amenities, and, ‘instant notification and gratification’ have become standard markers of society to be met with; are we getting drained physically, emotionally, psychologically due to this excessive obsession? It is of course a fact that time is money, and we have to make best use of it to carve a niche for ourselves — both materially, physically, and mentally; but, in a commoditized material world, full of the balance-sheet of profit and loss only, are we ourselves getting converted into objects / commodities in the same money market, controlled by the materialistic creed? Is our ‘need’ now getting converted into ‘greed’? And, is our ‘greed’ now pushing us to the nadir of corruption, without any realization, awakening, and, repentance of the same whatsoever? But simultaneously, we cannot deny the fact that we have to keep on advancing with this ‘material time’, which seems to run at a galloping speed to conquer, and discover new objects, and items; almost like a dictator, or, a business-minded scientist to spread them out to us for our material consumption. And, we are following the demands of this ‘material time’ too by absorbing, grabbing, and devouring as much as we can; but what exactly happens when our hungry belly feels satiated, filled up, and refuses to have more ‘material intake’? What happens when our satiated and fatigued mind declines to have ‘more’? Do we then refuse the materially advanced time and lag behind? But even though our human mind and appetite feel saturated, and filled to the brim; time keeps on advancing, along with new material needs, frontiers, and discoveries. What do we do then? Should we then delay, defer, and procrastinate all our activities because we cannot have more? But, given the current situation, would not the very fact of doing that amount to an extinction of ourselves as well? Or, should we then wait for a Divine intervention to decide the limit of it for us, and, leave everything on Him? But, is ‘Divine time’ is an abstract idea, or idealized fantasy to slower our material progress?

Key words: Material time, instant gratification, commoditized, money-market, need / greed, Divine time etc.

The Endeavour of the present paper is to look at how do we grapple with the concept of time today; modern time, present time, current time, whatever we call it. How can we assess the time consciousness today? Most of us have of course heard and grown up on English proverbs like ‘time and tide wait for none’, and feeling too that time is somewhere invisibly, ineluctably gliding on from the ‘present’, slipping immeasurably beyond the current at every minute, and every second; but when it comes to conceptualization and realization, what do we make of this? Of course one needs to make use of time to achieve something, reach somewhere, and be someone in life; but in an age of constant and

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instant gratification, multiplied / increased desires (both at personal as well as professional levels), demands, supplies, and fulfilments too, how can one view 'time'? If time was fleeting earlier, as has been reiterated by innumerable English poets and sonneteers time and again, has it become more so now, that is, more gliding, and fast, running with jet-like velocity? Has the advancement of AI, machines, humanoid robots, cyborgs etc. made time to run faster? Have the rapid technological progress, innovation; constant influx and incoming of information, busy corporatized life-schedules, online meetings, and multi-tasking skills made time to run immeasurably quick to even cope with? Is it that by being surrounded by several app-like desires, demands, and wish-fulfilment keys on an everyday basis (like Whatsapp, local train app, Ola / Uber app, PharmEasy app, Zomato, Swiggy, English-learning app, AIChatbots, ChatGPTs, dating apps etc., to name a few) through our android smart-phones; ever ready to do our bidding, we have somehow lost track of the objective real time altogether? In a time to install / download now and get now, apply now and get now, connect now and receive now, demand now and buy now; are we getting caught in the endless loop of the immediate, easy, always available, accessible, convenient, instant gratifications, thereby increasing our demand for 'more' and causing time seem to run really fast? Have we lost the creative beauty of time by being crumbled with facts and information explosion? Or, is time only hoodwinking us by engaging into this consumer-production game? What is exactly the truth, and how should we then view this present time? How long can we be busy in seizing the day? Of course, time is precious, and not to be wasted, and we have ample proof of it in the argument of the metaphysical poets like Marvell, Donne, Herrick who showed us the value of time long ago:

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
morrow will be dying (Herrick, n.d., lines 1-4)

Even the incandescent, radiant sun has to lose its brilliance even though it has risen higher in the sky:

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting. (Herrick, n.d., lines 5-8)

Andrew Marvell also emphasized on the brevity of time in our life, and the fact that we have to achieve so much, perform so much, and desire so much in such a short span:

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity. (Marvell, n.d., lines 21-24)

These lines of Marvell however instantly remind us of the fleeting, changing nature of time, and the importance of enjoying and grabbing the present as much as we can, expressed elsewhere too; like in the life philosophy conveyed in the song sung by Sonu Nigam in the famous 2003 movie 'Kal Ho Na Ho' ('Tomorrow May Not Be'):

Har ghadi badal rahi hain roop zindagi (Every moment life is changing)
Chaanv hai kabhi, kabhi (Sometimes there is shade, sometimes)
Hain dhoop zindagi (There is sun)

Har pal yahan (Here every moment)
Jee bhar jiyo jo hai samaa (You should live to the fullest, this very moment)
Kal ho naa ho (May not be there tomorrow)
(Nigam, 2003)

The shortness of time for human beings has also been hinted / suggested / indicated by another chief metaphysical poet John Donne in his poem 'The Flea', where he has shown us perspicaciously, how a flea can easily get what it wants, that is, to suck the blood from the speaker's beloved's body without having to ask / bother for her consent / permission, and, without the wastage of any time whatsoever; which is, however, difficult in the human world. In the human world a lot of time gets wasted for courting / wooing / convincing the beloved to cause a moment of union, like the poet is doing here, and even after that all the efforts can go in vain:

Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
How little that which thou deniest me is;
It sucked me first, and now sucks thee,
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be;
Thou know'st that this cannot be said
A sin, nor shame, nor loss of maidenhead,
Yet this enjoys before it woo,
And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do. (Donne, 1633, lines 1-9)

Now, of course the metaphysical poets have talked about time in the context of love, passion, and, mostly fleshly / physical / consummated love; but ironically the importance of time in human life, and the fact that every present moment is taking / carrying us away from the cradle towards the grave ultimately, has also been outlined by the great master William Shakespeare in his sonnets, and dramas as well:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle,
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing. (The Play, Shakespeare, 2001, p. 228-229)

So, if this is true that the inevitable dusty death is always lurking somewhere to put a halt to our life, and we have shortness of time in our hand, then we need seize as much as possible, failing which our life desires, and fulfilments can be untimely truncated. And, being fed on this philosophy, we have been seated upon the back of a fast-tracked horse which is running at a galloping speed to acquire, possess, and chase more in a profit and loss centric world. But the point is, in this app-centric world, in the rush, need, and greed to know more, acquire more, gather more, and gain more (lest our progress, or, more precisely our material progress gets halted, and we lag behind others in a competitive

society, and not a co-operative society), are we getting drained emotionally, psychologically, and mentally to say that time has advanced far enough / ahead now which we cannot match up to? Is the need to raise our individual standards in current times, and, the temptation of high living; sometimes much beyond one's capacity, and mentality, proving to be tiresome for us today? Has time actually advanced in terms of mathematical and objective calculation, or, has the perception of time changed for us only, due to the increasing pressure of the absorption of facts, information, and. opening of newer methods / channels of communication / interaction to keep note of? So, should we now get disillusioned, and disenchanted with the current times now, to go into a Prufrock-like seclusion? Should we now sit satiated with what we have got / achieved so far, with no further need for more, rather preferring the peace of our minds? But would not this satiety, complacency then lead to a sudden and unwanted halt in our growth; or develop a sense of procrastination, dilemma, anxiety, and indecisiveness, leading to a delay and deferment in all our day-to-day activities just like Prufrock:

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street
Rubbing its back upon the windowpanes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

(Thomas Stearns Eliot, Green, 2005, p. 185-186)

Would not this sudden seclusion and motionlessness result in a sudden state of confusion in us:

And indeed there will be time.
To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'
Time to turn back and descend the stair.

(Thomas Stearns Eliot, Green, 2005, p.185)

Can we really afford to sit dumb and mum like Prufrock in an era when the society and community have turned highly individualistic; with property and wealth becoming the exclusive marker of one's prosperity and propriety, and a mean self-centrism governing our progress by shutting the gates of hospitality and mutual co-operation among several classes? Would not the adoption of such a nihilistic stance essentially compromise with our self-existence? :

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball

To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
.....
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: 'This is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all.'
.....
.....
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
'That is not it at all,
This is not what I meant, at all.'
(Thomas Stearns Eliot, Green, 2005, p.187-188)

While this is true that, with the need and greed to have more wealth, property, money, and material progress, we have become self-centred, almost Prufrock-like secluded in our own money-making dens / cabins, with there being no intention to interact with the larger humanity; this has inevitably resulted in an unending 'envy', and, 'irreconcilable class division' among ourselves, as Rabindranath Tagore argued in his English essay 'Wealth and Welfare'. Also he has discussed, that in the ceaseless game of production and consumption, the desire of more, and, acquisition of more, we are getting gravitated towards the vortex of greed, and, getting deviated from the path of righteousness and morality, which are the pillars of humanity, and, way to one's soul:

But in recent centuries a devastating change has come over our mentality with regard to the acquisition of money. Whereas in former ages men treated it with condescension, even with disrespect, now they bend their knees to it. That it should be allowed a sufficiently large part in society, there can be no question; but it becomes an outrage when it occupies those seats which are specially reserved for the immortals, by bribing us, tampering with our moral pride... Such a state of things has come to pass because, with the help of science, the possibilities of profit have suddenly become immoderate. The whole of the human world, throughout its length and breadth, has felt the gravitational pull of a giant planet of greed, with concentric rings of innumerable satellites, causing in our society a marked deviation from the moral orbit. In former times the intellectual and spiritual powers of this earth upheld their dignity of independence and were not giddily rocked on the tides of the money market. But, as in the last fatal stages of disease, this fatal influence of money has got into our brain and affected our heart. (The Modern Age, Tagore, 1996, p. 539-540)

So, is it wholesome to enter into a concentric circle of greed, selfishness, opportunism due to the exorbitant demand for 'more'? Are we becoming 'political' and 'commercial' day after day by being driven by success, and aided by the phantasmagorical scientific progress, and the unprecedented rise of the machines, AI, ChatGPT models everywhere? Is the need for 'more', increasing commodity fetish to be in sync with the current times, and, self-aggrandizement, and, constant self-advertisements making us too

mechanical, artificial, efficiency and output-oriented by perennially blocking the humanitarian side in us, and, preventing us to listen to the call of our souls? : Where man has need, he must furnish himself with materials; but where he has fullness, there is manifest his immortality; Man's envy and hatred are in the region of his material needs, the region where he is in want. Here he erects his barricades and maintains his guards. Here he is for self-aggrandizement and for the exclusion of other. But where he is immortal he displays, not things, but his soul. He invites all to enter. His distribution does not mean diminution, and so peace reigns. (Lectures and Addresses, Tagore, 2012, p. 431)

Has the need for more infected us like some pest now, which is able to multiply itself continually; or, like some contagious disease coming from the west? Have we all turned into profit-making human tools in the mechanical world of the machines, android robots, and AI? : Let no one imagine that I am referring to the relations between the Western masters and their Eastern servants only. The undue stress laid on the mechanical side of the world, both in external and internal relations, has similarly created a split in the policy of the West. If the mechanical bonds of association be made into a fetish, the living bonds of voluntary fellowship slacken. And this, in spite of the fact that these mechanical bonds make for extraordinary mechanical efficiency. Commodities multiply, markets spread, tall buildings pierce the sky. Not only so, but in education, healing and the amenities of life, man also gains real success. That is because the machine has its own truth. But this very success makes the man, who is obsessed by its mechanism, hanker for more and more mechanism. And as his greed continually increases, he has less and less compunction in lowering man's true value to the level of his own machine. (Lectures and Addresses, Tagore, 2012, p. 432)

So, there is no denying the fact that we are surrounded by material greed and creed everywhere in current times, in present times, and just as one sin begets another, similarly one greed invites more such chain of greeds to submerge us into a quagmire of non-assimilatory material prosperity leading to a corruption of soul, basically coming from the West: Thus, man with his mental and material power far outgrowing his moral strength, is like an exaggerated giraffe whose head has suddenly shot up miles away from the rest of him, making normal communication difficult to establish. This greedy head, with its huge dental organization, has been munching all the topmost foliage of the world, but the nourishment is too late in reaching his digestive organs, and his heart is suffering from want of blood. Of this present disharmony in man's nature the West seems to have been blissfully unconscious. The enormity of its material success has diverted all its attention toward self-congratulation on its bulk. (Tagore, 2012, p. 32)

But surely this interminable need, greed, deception, hypocrisy, self-centric covetousness cannot be an end in them. Is it why we have intellectual artists like Stephen Dedalus from the West confessing his sin against this malnourished materialism? : Could it be that he, Stephen Dedalus, had done those things? His conscience sighed in answer. Yes, he had done them, secretly, filthily, time after time, and, hardened in sinful impenitence, he had dared to wear the mask of holiness before the tabernacle itself while his soul within was a living mass of corruption. How came it that God had not struck him dead? The leprous company of his sins closed about him, breathing upon him, bending over him from all sides. He strove to forget them in an act of prayer, huddling his limbs closer

together and binding down his eyelids: but the senses of his soul would not be bound and, though his eyes were shut fast, he saw the places where he had sinned and, though his ears were tightly covered, he heard. (Joseph, 2010, p. 214-215)

Do we need a Stephen like spiritual awakening, and a realization of one's sins, and a due repentance and confession of them before God, when enmeshed into the inextricable web of material progress, which is blinding us in current times, modern times: The whisper ceased and he knew then clearly that his own soul had sinned in thought and word and deed wilfully through his own body. Confess! He had to confess every sin. How could he utter in words to the priest what he had done? Must, must. Or how could he explain without dying of shame? Or how could he explain without dying of shame? Or how could he have done such things without shame? A madman, a loathsome madman! Confess! O he would indeed to be free and sinless again! Perhaps the priest would know. O dear God!... How beautiful must be a soul in the state of grace when God looked upon it with love! (Joseph, 2010, p. 217)

Do we hear an echo of the world poet Rabindranath Tagore in Stephen Dedalus's tone when he realizes through the Christian religious teachings preached to him in Belvedere college, that no material gain obtained at the expense of the soul, can do good to a man because it leads him away from the path of God (the all merciful from whom we have come, and to whom we have to go someday)?: During these few days I intend to put before you some thoughts concerning the four last things. They are, as you know from your catechism, death, judgement, hell and heaven. We shall try to understand them fully during these few days so that we may derive from the understanding of them a lasting benefit to our souls. And remember, my dear boys, that we have been sent into this world for one thing and one thing alone: to do God's holy will and to save our immortal souls. All else is worthless. One thing alone is needful, the salvation of one's soul. What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he suffer the loss of his immortal soul? Ah, my dear boys, believe me there is nothing in this wretched world that can make up for such a loss. (Joseph, 2010, p. 193)

For, after all we need to be aware / cautious of God's judgement about being positioned in heaven or hell, on the basis of our activities in the world. The omnipotent God is always keeping a strict vigil on each of our activity; However we may try to hoodwink Him: Time was to sin and to enjoy, time was to scoff at God and at the warnings of His holy church, time was to defy His majesty, to disobey His commands, to hoodwink one's fellow men, to commit sin after sin and to hide one's corruption from the sight of men. Now it was God's turn: and He was not to be hoodwinked or deceived. Every sin would then come forth from its lurking place, the most rebellious against the divine will and the most degrading to our poor corrupt nature, the tiniest imperfection and the most heinous atrocity. What did it avail then to have been a great emperor, a great general, a marvellous inventor, the most learned of the learned? All were as one before the judgement seat of God. He would reward the good and punish the wicked. One single instant after the body's death, the soul had been weighed in the balance. The particular judgement was over and the soul had passed to the abode of bliss or to the prison of purgatory or had been hurled howling into hell. (Joseph, 2010, p. 195).

So, what should we follow in current / contemporary times — crave for an overwhelmingly ‘material time’ for our own survival, existence, and, betterment (which has an element of truth attached to it), or avoid the drudgery, slowness, sloth, procrastination of a commercial, material self, fatigued by being grated by the gigantic wheels of materialism; to ultimately wait for an opportune ‘Divine time’ to make a necessary balance? For, after all, sometimes we need to leave something on the divine to decide the limits of the material prosperity for us, without however losing contact with our soul, and the purpose of our being sent into this world. So, however we are lamenting for / grieving over a lost time in our mortal human life to have missed an opportunity for ‘more’, probably that time, instead of being ‘lost’, and ‘wasted’, was actually a time for preparation for a higher growth, development, and productivity in us, often unknowingly, and unseen. Should we now trust the divine then regarding our material aspirations, and cravings, as have been echoed by ‘Kaviguru’ Rabindranath Tagore in his poem ‘Lost Time’?

:

On many an idle day have I grieved over lost time
But it is never lost, my Lord.
Thou hast taken every moment of my life in
Thine own hands.

.....
I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed
And imagined all work had ceased.
In the Morning I woke up
And found my garden full with wonders of flowers.
(Tagore, n.d., lines 1-12)

But, if we do that, would we not miss out on the splendid dynamics, and chaotic brilliance of the era of the 5G internets, androids, easy accessibilities, AI, and ChatGPTs? : Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir! (Dickens, 2005, p. 1)

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About the Author: Debabrata Adhikary, Assistant Professor in English, Hooghly Women's College, west-Bengal.