



The anatomy of suffering

G N Sharma¹, Shri B K Chary²

¹ Department of Chemistry, Institute of Career Development and Gandhian Studies, S.B. Science College, Aurangabad, Maharashtra, India

² P.L. Govt. Polytechnic College, Latur, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

There is no motion without friction unless a cent percent void is artificially created. Every living organism experiences the struggle for existence. None is exempted from this Phenomenal Universal Truth. However, certain soothing quotes in the interest of all, rather panhumanistic in tone and approach, have been publicised. Accordingly, we shall have to convince ourselves optimistically, that no doubt to live is to struggle but at any rate it cannot and should not be hurriedly concluded as any sort of misfortune. There have been sufferings emerging owing to Nature's wrath and our own miscalculations or judgements. Blaming on some entity for our suffering is a convenient habit drawing self-pity, to which we are all accustomed. Extending this habit disproportionately further, causes a temptation to embrace pessimism and also resorting finally to fatalism. On an impartial perusal it would be seen that most of the times it is we alone are totally responsible for the scenario though to admit it would demand exhibition of genuine manhood. There are indeed many factors right from the personal front to social circumstances. Each factor is clearly defined. That is why psychological, physical, emotional, mental and philosophical analyses must be considered before labelling the person as pessimistic or otherwise. In fact how a person combats with sufferings decides his/her nature cum personality. Clash of two opposite forces in nature creates a resultant force which may or may not be quite advantageous to the owner. While we wrestle with our own feelings we usually lose the sense of discrimination to elect the worthy one from the chaos. This is the root cause of all the burden of confusion entertained by us. Since there are various reasons and areas for suffering, nothing can be concluded easily and correctly. However, the paper would try to explore the possible remedial measures by trying to understand root causes that have pervade limitlessly mostly out of human ignorance. Therefore, most of the aspects of human personality would be covered to dispel ignorance and arrive at some concluding remarks thereof.

Keywords: Struggle, suffering, causes, remedial measures

Introduction

One of the important pre-requisites needed in the modern world for us is understanding human personality with its limitations. We are ready to accept our personal and social limitations but merely on the physical plane. When it comes to the mental or emotional aspect we voluntarily allow an uncontrollable heavy luggage of expectations from all nooks. At the same time we do instill so much confidence within that every desire seems to be justifiable. This eventually becomes a habit and further the root cause of suffering. Another miscalculation which takes the heavy toll is thoughtlessly relying on the theoretically judged efficacy of the much publicised virtues. It is the open failure on our part for the incapacity in handling the virtues. It is also a big folly to imagine that all virtues would ever unfailingly produce joy and comfort, irrespective of the method of handling. Secondly the habit of attaching importance to a single cause for all our psychological issues, which is much in vogue, can lead only to an utter disappointment. In this context one of the popular methods proposed by Sigmund Freud is a good example which supports the belief that 'Psychological issues were generated by repressed sexual feelings ^[1].' Similarly 'Adler saw us as social beings who create a style of life in response to the environment and to what we feel we lack ^[2].'

To begin with the common mistake usually committed is extrapolating our wishful thinking. No doubt there could be some sort of inference possible but the base has to be

faultless. Refusing to understand the rhythm of Nature or disobeying the same could be one of the major mistakes. Similarly every decadewise there is bound to be a visible shift in the prevailing societal norms and therefore we do realize a sort of 'generation' gap. Nothing remains static. Expecting uniformity throughout in all human affairs is a blunder and it results into suffering. We all know certain types of suffering which can be grouped into physical suffering akin to body, viz; Hunger, Indisposition, Pain, Death, Disability etc. Similarly on the mental plane we experience Frustration, Depression, Anxiety, Loneliness, Guilt etc. Some of these can be easily dealt with when clarification is sought but limitations of our body are to be sportively acknowledged. No doubt with the development of science we can excel to a certain extent yet that attempt could indicate success upto a certain level only. We need to remember that every individual is a special case and therefore our personal consciousness would widely differ when compared to others. Similarly it would vary even on daily basis owing to the new circumstances challenging us. Sometimes our perceptions, on analysis might turn out to be grossly incorrect. Similarly our memories may also weaken or fade away. That is why our imaginative power may also not be totally trustworthy. We have our own nurtured conjectures and their subsequent interpretations, which we voluntarily rely upon without pruning. As with time many things fizzle out and later on we realize our own faulty planning or careless attempts that we vehemently carried

forward in catching the aims. This automatically creates a path for brooding over the past happenings leading to unsurmountable sufferings. From an absolute pragmatic point of view it would be clear that our own inconsistency in holding on to the opinions formed causes, though partly, typical suffering. We have a lot of discrepancy in our own successive opinions about the same thing. We may even be wondering about our own past responses or reactions towards a situation That is also one of the reasons for getting a feeling that in past our actions were not exactly matured. They could also seem to us as merely an outburst of our unchecked feelings or sentiments. Therefore, study of human psychology would surely lead us to or atleast may be tending to scientific outlook towards our own mental life. We have bundles of habits and not having a proportionate control over them means our own invitation to sufferings.

Psychological distress

There can be many factors responsible for creating distress in one's life. It may be an immediate and later on consistent effect of haunting experiences. Right from the work place stress, health issues to very personal disturbed emotions can definitely lead to almost most damaging and lasting disorder. Naturally the major contribution might come firstly from biological and then mount on to psychological. Social cause may also play an assistive role. This is usually read out by the onlookers through the manifestation of lingering sadness, fatigue, irritation, loss of memory, aggressive nature etc. But then when it comes to a consistent depression, it would hit an alarming bell. There can be various types of depression depending upon individual's capacity or response, age, social atmosphere and gender. Emotional pain may be looked upon though on the mental plane affecting even the physical activities, as a very cumbersome psychosomatic feeling getting out of one's own control. In the field of suicidology, Shneidman says, "how much you hurt as a human being, it is mental suffering; mental torment ^[3]." Irrespective of the classification made under the broad title 'Suffering' we would easily realize that there are definitely shades of difference from the technical point of view. However, we may also conclude that all these types are unpleasant to the core and lead to a disaster if not treated properly.

Victor frankl

From the human psychological point of view Victor Frankl's analysis does help us in reading between the lines avoiding the subject jargons. In fact we are quite accustomed to the "Will" factor from the philosophical point of view, Eastern as well as Western approaches. In the present context of psychological background 'The Will to Meaning' is the main take to understand the process of suffering. Certain human activities do involve 'Voluntary Suffering' but would also lead to solace, though at times in a mystic form. 'Sacrifice' thus, is the term which might apparently indicate an elected loss or suffering but from Frankl's point of view, it ceases to be suffering, the moment it discovers meaning. A little philosophical interpretation is provided by Frankl by concluding life's suffering would end only when the meaning is inferred in a proper way. In "Man's Search for Meaning" Frankl refers to Nietzsche. "He who has a why to live for can bear almost any How." In other words, there has to be efforts directed to find meaning rather than seeking merely pleasure or power in life. Those

who can achieve this would not have the severity of suffering. "You cannot control what happens to you in life, but you can always control what you will feel and do about what happens to you ^[4]." Fixing up of our aim of life can definitely sort out many problems which unnecessarily crop up. Freud's analysis cum conclusion that the primary aim of life has to be a quest for pleasure or the efforts must be neatly oriented in such a way that they would be in the channel of pleasure only. This means at every stage combating with the possible suffering would ultimately bring upon happiness or even pleasure thereof. In a similar fashion from Alfred Adler's viewpoint, Life has to be taken up in the spirit of competition so as to excel and seek power. This according to him promises all happiness and comfort too. Both these solutions would mean slightly at least to ignore the root cause of suffering or the rigid existence of suffering. Overcoming the 'Suffering' has many ways to adopt.

Philosophical ideas

From philosophical outlooks we have various intentions expressed, in a nutshell, regarding the "Will Factor" dwelling within us. At times it is the power or earnest desire to excel or hunt out to find or reach a genuine meaning to live meaningfully. We have references with regard to this right from Plato, Hobbes, Hume, Leibniz, Hegel, William James, Nietzsche and Arthur Schopenhauer, who have vigorously dealt with this problem. Many times thinkers and philosophers energetically explore to discover the underlying truth but how to overcome the same is left to us. Certain 'isms' do play a sizeable and significant role in controlling the adverse forces but they do not suffice to cover all the aspects. That is why no ism as such can satisfy all or even all the time or every occasion even to those who ardently support its postulates. For example, when Nihilism was expressed even through literature in all languages worldwide and also philosophy, it could really attract particularly the younger generation and possibly frustrated souls. However, it could also cover only a select faction of the society. "Nihilism does not contend that there is nothing but it states that everything is meaningless. And George A Sargent was right when he promulgated the concept of 'Learned meaninglessness'. He himself remembered a therapist who said, "George you must realize that the world is a joke. There is no justice, everything is random. Only when you realize this will you understand how silly it is to take yourself seriously. There is no grand purpose in the universe. There's no particular meaning in what decisions you make today about how to act ^[5]." A general remark is always made that living for 'What' disturbs human mind when it starts thinking about the pattern of life. It is always the lack of meaning which has given a way to despondency. Arthur Schopenhauer's 'Will' factor shows our living in itself is a purposeless exercise and it is the 'Will' which is blind ever striving for freedom. This, according to him, can be considered as a universal phenomenon because it would very easily be detected in plants and animal kingdoms also. He has gone to the extent of including the material of the inanimate world too. Therefore, it is this particular characteristic of the 'Will' which obviously becomes the root cause of our sufferings. Although it seems Schopenhauer's description of the world is intensely pessimistic and he manages to stick to the idea in a suave manner, he also points out at the rhythmical functioning of

the world with a scientific base. Every operation to him is connected to the causal effect as the primary reason than attaching everything to disorderliness. We live in a world always riding on causality and therefore, it is the result of "Sufficient Reason" which goes well with the laws of Nature. Therefore, as long as the base of our suffering is not properly analysed or construed we would periodically be caught into an illusion, thinking that there is no end to it or any hope for a betterment. Our whole personality therefore is a representation of our own Will which is wantonly adopted or chosen and nurtured. So this approach sounds to be roughly parallel to Freud's claim of the domination of our own desires, urges and understanding of the world we live in. Unless we make corrections in a sportive manner in our thinking there cannot be any release from the veil of ignorance or illusion. Delearning with wisdom can bring in veracity in knowledge and thought for sure.

Acknowledging Freudian concept but with practical wisdom and later philosophizing the same, an atheist by temperament, Bertrand Russell also admitted that repression of certain intense desires is extremely damaging. Natural feelings or instincts when deliberately and artificially controlled would lead to a disaster, which we generally refer to "Suffering". This is where the conscious mind suffers at the hands of unconscious mind. Getting voluntarily deprived of happiness would definitely land us in an area full of suffering and gloom. Usually this happens in young age but later when carried incessantly, unless a correction is made. 'Some people feel that the state of the world gives them no reason. However, Russell notes, "The truth is that they are unhappy for some reason of which they are not aware, and this unhappiness leads them to dwell upon the less agreeable characteristics of the world in which they live [6]."' Similarly Russell also directly attacks the conventional habits that are practised by us and they only aggravate the intolerable suffering. 'Mistaken views of the world, mistaken ethics, mistaken habits of life, leading to destruction of the natural zest and appetite for possible things upon which all happiness, whether men or animals ultimately depends [7].'

Conclusion

Majority turn to Religion, Epics, Mythologies or Religious philosophies with the hope to easily eliminate 'Suffering' completely and entertaining the strong belief that miracles do take place for sure. In a world so big there are definitely chances for accidental happenings and also the law of chance does prevail smoothly. The slender percentage, surprisingly, dominates and pervades to such a great extent enshrouding with a thick impenetrable screen of ignorance. Instead of using self analytical faculty or common sense, dependency on a humanly created Chance theory has been growing up wildly and enormously, in a consistent manner. It would be wise to exert to know the reality so as to release self and others from the shackles of the falsity of hopes.

At the outset, we need to accept 'Suffering' as an integral part of life. It is the same as a combination of virtues and vices, that we face in our day today life though we abhor the latter. The very paradigm of life has 'Suffering' placed continually and so it cannot be evaded at any cost. It is a gross mistake usually committed by almost all by considering all life events to produce only joy or pleasure. Similarly it is also a thoroughly hollow claim that everything can produce the desired results when handled properly. Other way around, there are scores of events

which unexpectedly crop up taking us by a sheer surprise and indirectly suggesting that very little control can be exercised by us. In all phases of life we have packets of surprises getting unfolded without any clue or prior notice. Therefore, philosophically without subscribing to any set of emotionally stuffed viewpoints, a fact is to be accepted that negativities in life had been and would continue with an upper hand, owing to which 'Suffering' can never be erased. The only way is to march by accepting the scourge of suffering and understanding every fibre of it. For this, we need to know it thoroughly and accept sportively. In this regard most of our ignorance can be exposed or warded off by subjecting a given situation to scientific analysis. There may be a mystical zone wherein scientific principles have not been potent enough to pull the strings for catching the ultimate Truth. But then such zones are rare. It is a fact that certain emotional disturbances are definitely realistic and they cannot be dismissed or tranquilized merely by logical thinking or analysis. Many times it is the personal level insecurity which invites fear and that begins to influence our total personality.

Ultimately it can impartially be concluded that most of the mental level woes are chiefly because of missing out of the 'meaning' or 'purpose' in life. Even when the physical demands are squarely met with, a meaninglessness in life persists. That is why only a select percentage of people who may be considered as genuinely evolved beings, have been able to conquer the 'existential vacuum' while the rest have been groping in darkness and struggling to fill up the void, emotional or otherwise. In a nutshell, the fact remains that to live is not just to manage welfare on the physical plane for body needs but trying to cope up with the emotional demands than uprooting them. 'In Buddhism the word 'reality' connotes the true nature of things, unmodified by the mental constructs we superimpose upon them. Such concepts open up a gap between our perception and reality, and create a never-ending conflict with the world. "We read the world wrong and say that it deceives us," wrote Rabindranath Tagore. We take for permanent that which is ephemeral and for happiness that which is but a source of suffering: the desire for wealth, for power, for fame, and for nagging pleasures [8].'

References

1. Butler Tom-Bowden, "50 Psychology Classics", Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London-Boston, 2017, 17.
2. *ibid*
3. Shneidman Edwin S, "The Suicidal Mind", Oxford University Press, 1996, 173.
4. Frankl Victor E. "Man's Search for Meaning", Rider Publications, 2008, 8.
5. The International Forum for Logotherapy, Transference and Countertransference in logotherapy, Fall/Winter, 1982:5(8):115-18.
6. Butler Tom-Bowden, "50 Philosophy classics", Nicholas Brealey Publishing, London-Boston, 2017, 256.
7. *ibid*
8. Ricard Matthieu, Happiness: A Guide to Developing Life's Most Important Skill, Atlantic Books, London, 2006, 24.