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Pain and suffering: A perspective from the natural world with decent contemplation

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Abstract---This paper intends to relate pain with suffering. In the natural world how do we try to look at these two important aspects of human life? This is a unique experience that an individual undergoes in certain environment. But the intention to do away with such hard feelings is not very easy, although every human being has a natural desire within oneself to be free from pain and suffering. It is needed for an individual and also for society to be free from pain and suffering in order to have an overall well-being. An approach to understand the matter deeply and intentions to quit from suffering may show us the path of relief. It is a way that helps to heal the world by alleviating suffering.

Keywords---healing, pain, renunciation, satisfaction, suffering.

Introduction

Pain can be explained in the natural world as a sort of physical injury or ailment or a kind of mental distress that arises out of some damage caused to an individual. If pain implies any of the above states then its lingering effect through the time is called suffering. Thus pain and suffering goes in tandem and cannot be considered as discrete elements. Where there is pain, there will be suffering however, small the lingering effect may be. Pain is always associated with physical injury and the suffering continues until it is healed up physically and mentally. If pain means any kind of physical damage, then this physical damage causes some unpleasant and nasty feelings in our minds. However, for mental pain, one has to have an understanding or experience of the pain or suffering that is going to come up for someone (Benbaji, 2018). For example if a human and a goat is being knotted to slaughter, the goat will have no fear as it doesn't understand what is

going to happen next and thus up to the point of getting slaughtered has no pain or suffering. However, for the human, it will be a constant suffering out of fear of being slaughtered after a few moments. His pain arises mentally and suffering begins in fear for losing his life. His mental pain may also get manifested onto his body in the form of suffering from high blood pressure or a worst case of cardiac arrest etc., during the few moments of extreme anxiety. On the other hand suffering in the natural world may also be painless. For example, a person after being healed from an injury or surviving a lethal disease may lead a painless life later on, but if any deformation of the body takes place like losing arms or organs may lead to permanent painless suffering. In the natural world, physical pain gets dominance and once it heals up, the suffering ends. However, in the physical world, people also suffer mentally without any physical pain like trauma, depression and some other psychological disorders. In such cases people try to heal it generally through the body i.e., by taking medicines, and in other cases consuming drugs and in extreme cases a suicidal attempt just to be away from that suffering (Demirkol, 2019). Rare are cases where a mental suffering is cured mentally. The next section makes an attempt to understand the nature of pain and suffering and its explanation from philosophical perspective.

Understanding pain and suffering

Generally pain is identified as mental episode that registers some physical damage (Routledge handbook). In other words pain is a perceptual state that represents some somatosensory bodily disorder. So a paradigmatic pain thus involves (a) damage to the body (b) registration of that damage (c) an Unpleasant feeling (d) the motivation to do something about both the unpleasant feeling and the damage and (e) an action in response to the unpleasant feeling and the damage. Thus pain leads to actions in order to ameliorate the bodily disorder. Such feelings tell us what one should do for the physical relief which, leads to a set of actions that is associated with pain. If pain is not relieved over time, then it leads to the persistently bad feelings viz. suffering. But what will be the outcome if no such somatosensory disorder is the cause of pain. How can such pain be addressed or cured. Many types of explanation can be provided to understand the nature of pain. Either one attempts to account the general personal level description, or tries to find remedy in medical science or carries out an elaborate scientific study to understand and analyse the pain. But, if we think of the matter from philosophical point of view then one has to clarify from philosophy of mind, epistemology and philosophy of religion. If pain is compared as a sensory perception, then it should be cognitively penetrable, only then it can yield rich epistemic discussion. When pain is analysed from the religious perspective, there pain is mostly claimed as self-inflicted. This brings in the practical areas of philosophy which includes ethics. Various questions come in mind, as how can pain lead to suffering, how can object of pain be perceived, what are the consequences in the real world. In search of answers to such questions, some glimpses of Indian philosophical thoughts have been discussed here.

The Upanisadic thoughts claim that consequences of the karma (Karmaphala) of the past inappropriate actions performed lead to pain and suffering which are both mental and physical. Even though one has to face the consequences of past actions or behaviour, still this is not the punishment theory; rather it's the moral

order of the Universe (Rta) to ensure that everyone attains their due results. Being bound by the physical laws, one encounters physical pain and suffering, but that does not affect the soul or self. As suffering is part of living until one reaches the ultimate goal of moksha. It's the state where one reaches leaving behind all worldly attachments and longing (Whitman, 2007). So one has to complete and empty the results of one's own action too by way of pleasure or suffering whatever. In Bhagavad Gita, Arjuna as seeker of wisdom too falls in the dilemma of hurting his own family, the near and dear ones on one hand, whereas fighting for the right to establish the dharma on the other. This leads to an unbearable pain and suffering mentally. One becomes desperate to find a relief for such pain, which is possible by re-focussing on Dharma. It is this powerful which helps in understanding the detachment that can be attained by yoga and meditation and the thought of suffering passes away.

According to the Samkhya thought, every purusha is bounded by pain and suffering, which they classify into three categories viz. psycho-physical pain, natural pain and supernatural causes of pain (Goswami, 2016). Even though Purusha by itself is free and pure consciousness, it is inactive, indifferent and also beyond space and time. But only the reflection in the buddhi makes it identify wrongly leading to bondage. The ego out of ignorance remains embodied due to prarabdha karma. Only by following eight fold path of yoga (Astangik yoga marga – yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dhyana, dharana & samadhi) one can overcome the bondage and also be released from the pain and suffering. In other words it is the knowledge that brings an end to all such misconceptions. Only then attachment towards transitory worldly objects get eliminated which closes the door for suffering. As pain comes with dissatisfaction and this ultimately leads to suffering, so only aversion towards any pleasures in the world brings an end to dis-satisfaction.

So on one hand we find pain and suffering is associated with misconceptions of worldly matters, for which one bears the suffering out of dissatisfaction. On the other hand, turning around the concept of pain from western perspective, it is seen that pain and suffering have bodily, psychological and socio-cultural dimensions. Both pain and pleasure arise from a somatosensory perception, followed by a pleasant or unpleasant emotion that leads to certain bodily changes (Noelia, 2017). So, phenomenal experience refers to physical pain which further leads to suffering as it's after effect, but we must be aware of and also equipped enough to bear the pain and overcome it as early as possible. If we fail to find way to overcome the suffering as for e.g. in diseases which lies beyond medical treatment, there we should strive to bear the pain in order to be relieved from it with some ultimate end. One must not fear pain, only then the physical pain and mental pain can be managed without leading it to the state of suffering only.

According to Buddhist theory, the suffering is the result of pain (dukkha) which is either physical or mental (due to old-age, sickness and death) out of distress as everything is impermanent and changes and by being a conditioned bring within the phenomenal world. In response to such suffering and pain, Buddha shows the eight-fold path to get rid of this pain and suffering, by realizing the true nature of self and other worldly objects. Buddhists believe that human being creates suffering for them through their greed, anger and ignorance. Thus all the Indian

philosophical theories outlines the nature of pain and to some extent tries to show the path to eliminate or minimize the pain. Now the question remains as whether an ordinary being can overcome the hurdles of pain!

Conclusion

Pain cannot be simply understood only by a signalling mechanism; it has an ontological and existential dimension and thus has to be understood holistically. As human beings spend most of their life in suffering out of different threats that come to their mind which can roughly be divided into eight frames that create and also helps to do away suffering. They are suffering as punishment, as reward, as natural destiny, as craving, as sacrifice, as manageable situation, as human purpose and finally as achieving the quality of life. Most of these frames depend on the socio-cultural dimension and so the suffering is mostly caused out of the play of emotions (Francis 2006). Still our intentions work to minimize and eradicate the suffering as far as possible. There the main intention is to understand the causes, contexts and results in order to attain relief from suffering.

From the ancient ages, suffering was thought to be imposed on individuals by higher authorities like God or moral order as punishment of the evil deeds done by the limited being of the world. In other words, suffering was also counted in rewards where the supreme authority indicates about those forbidden actions that one should restrain from to avoid any suffering further. Moreover Buddhists conceptualizes that suffering is caused from craving or attachments towards worldly objects, failure to attain those desired objects leads to agony. Only by avoiding un-restrained pleasure, the suffering can be controlled (Nikaya, 1971). Even practicing mindfulness leads one to be away from various cravings (Seigel, 2010). When people seek for the greater well-being of the others, they may suffer huge loss of material goods, but accumulates moral rewards in return. So, this is not a suffering, rather a way to overcome the suffering in a very holistic approach. Even the natural calamity or disaster brings with it untold sorrow, grief and suffering. These are the common notion across the world, where every mortal being faces death and decay that has to be admitted with a feeling of suffering. In absence of proper knowledge this suffering becomes very devastating, whereas the light of wisdom helps human beings to pursue the initiatives to minimize the pain and suffering as much as possible. The very manageable form of suffering that one can deal with is the physical pain or injury caused, that is reduced to the most possible extent by help of medication. Even the psychological suffering including depression and other mental problems can also be managed to a certain extent by help of medication. Any possible way may not lead to complete cessation of suffering, but in utmost extent try to reduce it as much as possible (Taylor 2007). One can overcome suffering also by helping the community to come out of its distress and to improve the quality of living for the overall society (Aurobindo, 2010).

Fundamentally, human suffering has become the greatest humanitarian challenge today. Suffering can be a consequence of hunger, poverty, violence, illness, injury, or depression, and it directly incapacitates people through fear, physical immobility and death. Not only it's the effect that results from affective

thoughts of our consciousness, rather it also includes our feelings about such thoughts which cause suffering within an individual. Suffering also generates social disorder among the individuals, threatens the survival of individuals, communities, and societies as a whole. Thus suffering is not just a matter of humanitarian concern rather the reduction of suffering should be included in effective strategic planning for global social and economic progress. Considering the suffering of others is, essentially, the development and operationalization of compassion. Every religion and moral strategies indicate to relieve suffering through self-satisfaction, compassion and power to overcome the phase of suffering and pain by help of the possible resorts available to an individual. But we cannot become truly compassionate toward others without also being compassionate to ourselves. Alleviating suffering is a force for healing the world—and ourselves. There is evidence that humans innately respond negatively to human suffering, no matter how distant. Furthermore, our inner desire to stop suffering is probably more powerful than our learned desire to end poverty, or increase life expectancy, or even to improve economic growth. This is a natural feeling within an individual to avoid, stop or minimize the suffering and lead a happy, joyous and peaceful life.

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