



MODES OF DEHUMANIZATION IN EXISTENTIAL POVERTY

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ABSTRACT:

KEYWORDS:

"Poverty is the worst form of violence." Gandhi said. It is a shock to learn that biggest global invisible humanitarian crisis is poverty. Poverty is like punishment for a crime you did not commit. Nelson Mandela while delivering a speech during Make Poverty History campaign said, while poverty persists, there is no true freedom. Need for the re-distribution of wealth inevitable now. The disparity between the rich and the poor is dangerous to the country. He believed that the wealthy should have enough to meet their needs but that they should take upon themselves to give their excesses away voluntarily. If one has wealth, he or she should use the excess wealth for service. The concept of Existential poverty deals with both, material poverty as well as dehumanization and protection of fundamental human right, the right to dignity and decent life. Both these factors have played significant role in establishing the social responsibility of literature across eras like enlightenment, renaissance, romanticism, realism or modernism to portray where society is headed to and how worse the consequences could be. Nietzsche suggested to reduce all social, moral and political values to zero or 'nothingness' and redefine them.

Usually low socioeconomic status people are seen as money wasters who thrive on the welfare schemes run by the government by taxpayer's money. Consequently, this attitude of elite is dehumanizing or animalizing a vast chunk of human population. The elite of the society think that people of low socioeconomic status are incompetent, imprudent, less educated and prone to habits of wasteful expenditure, improper consumption and irrational life style and they support government policies to earn more idle income. We can never uplift the poor by distributing free commodities. It makes people parasitic and they lose their dignity and self-respect. Literature is more about emotions and less about logic. Books about poverty have therapeutic and cathartic utility for elite of the society.

The segments of the society who are less privileged economically or are physically or mentally challenged; women who due to numerous social evils are in vulnerable situation are always cast out of the society mainstream and suffer isolation or marginalization. The upper caste people had been exploiting lower caste since centuries. They are not only materially deprived but also their fundamental right to live life with dignity is also snatched. Arundhati Roy has observed that it is as important for Dalits to tell their stories as it has been for colonized peoples to write their own histories. Between desperate people and hope stand the God. Majority of people believe in the Theory of Karma; what goes around comes around. By blaming destiny and their past deeds, people shirk their responsibility for inaction towards social injustice. Endurance of suffering is revered as penance. Reports and surveys are institutionalised and may cater to the need of authorities. They develop a narrative to either raise more funds or to show their achievement and commitment to the cause. We remain ignorant of a vast community who they are, what they need and what they deserve. We forget to look at them as humans since they have become numbers for us.

Humanism is the system of thought in which human interest, values and dignity are held dominant. It is attitude of man towards mankind, to see man in totality of his existence. Man deserves to exercise his fundamental rights of freedom, dignity and self-respect. The concentration camps of Nazi in Germany and Gulag in Russia, Ghetto of Bulgaria and detention center of Austria, India and Bangla Desh for unlawful immigrants are examples of existential dehumanisation. Insufficient food, hard labor, lack of medicines, inhuman derogatory use of language, fear, anxiety, malnutrition, pandemics are the hallmarks of these human conglomeration inhabited in most inhuman conditions. Despite backbreaking labor, dehumanizing treatment, and vigilant officials made

reading and writing spiritually and logistically difficult, life in the camps was full of creativity in the form of oral and written literature, painters, sculptures and thinkers.

On a broader spectrum, all alternative life styles have silent nod of society despite superficial resistance to it. The acceptance of one value is not condemnation of other. In his racist play *The Respectful Prostitute* Sartre draws the principles of existentialism like freedom and responsibility in relation to racism which causes dehumanization of a breed which is considered as white man's burden. Domestic violence is accepted norm of marital life in lower segment of the society. Women of this segment have a notion that physical abuse is part of life and sometime they exercise their right to hit back. Men may develop hostile attitudes toward women and abuse them as a way to hide feelings of personal weakness and uncertainty and, ultimately, to displace their state of stressful discontent, impotency and cowardice.

Impersonality and dehumanization are the benchmarks of beurocracy. The insensitivity of a public servant is appreciated by superiors in hierarchical beurocracy. Their job is to execute policy-makers will and intent at the grass root level. They spend time in finding lacuna in the policy by which certain right can be denied to a beneficiary. A tormented beneficiary does not get relief by appealing to the higher authorities since they have implied consent to work within the framework of rules. This has resulted in beurocracy becoming byword for red tape, lack of initiative and innovation and poor public service delivery. They are the biggest hurdle in the growth and development of any country especially third world countries, which are worst hit by poverty, and where most of the exchequer is spent on policies made for upliftment of downtrodden sector of the society. Though decision without emotional influence would be better, more effective and importantly unbiased in character as personal interests and human fallacies have created instability seen in the feudal system of society.

Real essence of the administration and governance is to provide serve people and implement the public policy after its formulation impartially and without bias. Change in political system makes beurocracy vulnerable and they are not accountable for not taking an emotional intelligent decision. The physiological needs of food, the psychological need of security and emotional need of love and care is common in all animals including humans. What distinguishes man from animal is dignity. The human beings are unique in their free will and decision-making based on rational and free moral choice. That is why poverty which limits free will and freedom of choices is seen as a factor which forces human to live an animal life.

Do all human beings have an equal worth just by being human, even if they have no source to acknowledge that such worth does exists, and that no other human being under any circumstances is entitled to deprive him of that worth. Dignity is a choice and no one can deprive us of it as long as we do not give up our self-respect. Absolute poverty is a abyss created by men in power by compelling

majority of people to live a life characterized by homelessness, insufficient food, malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality and low life expectancy. Normally loss of dignity is caused by others but in case of poverty an individual is not the cause but it is side- effect of the act of many. The dignity is a kind of inherent dignity that can be violated. Dignity claims self-respect which in turn claims for right to choose.

Human beings all over the world are discarded, humiliated, marginalized and dehumanized. They are subjected to slavery and torture in the name of colonization. The oppressed suffer poverty and starvation without any grudge. Even in modern world direct armed conflict causing war and indirect armed conflict as terrorist activities are frequent. Unequal law of corporal and capital punishment, racism and genocide, arbitrary detention and enforced disappearance, rape and human trafficking is caused by absolute powerlessness. The victims certainly feel there is gross human rights violations and they have lost their dignity and humanity.

Beurocracy is a impersonal organization with well defined hierarchical structure and clear rules, regulations, and lines of authority, which govern it. This is where emotional intelligence training can provide panacea, but any discretion allowed in the name of emotional intelligence will provide a leverage to pressure groups to operate and beurocrates are likely to succumb for gratification of mutual vested interest. However if the policies are framed not as a matter of routine, but conditioned by practical needs and dynamics of human existence, it may provide wider and deeper application of policies.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Coolie*, is a heart-wrenching narration of human suffering. Munoo represents innumerable children who are compelled to perform menial task just for a square meal and a shade. The childhood is most beautiful part of human life but they lost it in want of love and care. The picaresque character Munoo earns our sympathy for his consistent misfortune but Anand's object is to pinch us to awaken a feeling of social responsibility towards less fortunate sector of the society. There are many writers in Indian Writing in English who have dealt with the themes of untouchability and other social evils, which result into marginalization. The thrust is on the evolution of the society in which the haves and have not both can enjoy happily the bliss of human life. In the novel *Coolie*, Anand tries to depict the social reality of the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed. The novel shows the unbridgeable gap between the exploiters and the exploited, the rulers and the ruled. True art is an ally in struggle to achieve the humanistic ideal by defeating the forces, which create hurdle such as capitalism, colonization, fascism, racism, feudalism and communalism. The author who fights for cause of poors is a missionary who wants to bring a social change by demanding love and justice for all by making an appeal to our conscience. Gandhi narrated his trusteeship idea in following words, "The whole idea of possessing wealth only to guard it from

being misused and to distribute it equitably aims at protecting human dignity" (*Gandhi Marg*). The trusteeship idea is combination of economics and morals. If rich chooses to spend frivolously on themselves rather than alleviating the poor 'who stands last in the queue' (*antyoday*), it would be an act of violence. Some authors are not so explicit while exploring the extent of dehumanization.

Franz Kafka in *The Metamorphosis* narrated the story of a destitute that faces extreme dehumanization and feels that he is transformed into an insect and starts behaving like one. Gregor Samsa the main character faces eventual death from his inability to confront the world and defend his own existence, the stripping of his humanity, and the rapid deterioration of his body. Gregor is isolated in his room which not accessible to other family members. When he tries to speak he makes some garbled, distorted, chirping sound. Thus, he has lost the communication with the rest of the world. This lack of meaningful relationship causes existential angst in Gregor. The alienation caused in such circumstances results into self-condemnation. A person is confronted with 'another self' whose existence he is ashamed of. Satre considers that shame is an acknowledgment that others exist and has the capability to look at an individual and judge. The feeling of shame leads to alienation or the distancing of a person from themselves or others or vice versa. We can draw the conclusion that to human beings are essentially existential, they need have meaningful relationship, effective communication and dignity by earning respect in the eyes of society as well as their own. Here setting of the novel plays a role of character.

The Marxist view that woman perform domestic tasks such as cleaning, cooking and child bearing are proletariat and men perform tasks of hunting and fishing are bourgeois class, is condemned by most of the feminist. The economic policies, be it is capitalist, communist or socialist does not affect the status of women, by and large she remains at the bottom strata of the society.

We cannot remain neutral to injustice and oppression; by being silent, we support the oppressor. We must take a stand and raise voice against tormentor in support of victim. Tomorrow we may be the victim. Fight until the justice is delivered. Amen.

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