

A Critical Evaluation of Human Suffering in View of Samkhya Yoga

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Abstract

No creature so miserable as man, so generally molested, in miseries of body, in miseries of mind, miseries of heart, in miseries asleep, in miseries awake, in miseries where so ever he turns. A mere temptation is our life, on this earth is ever fettered of sorrow. Who can endure the miseries of it? In prosperity we are insolent and intolerable, dejected in adversity, in all fortunes foolish and miserable. In adversity I wish for prosperity, and in prosperity I am afraid of adversity. What mediocrity may be found? Where is no temptation? What condition of life is free? Wisdom has labor annexed to it. Glory and envy, riches and cares, children and encumbrances, pleasure and diseases, rest and beggary go together; as if a man were therefore born (as the Platonists hold), to be punished in this life for some precedent sins; or that, nature may be rather accounted a stepmother than a mother unto us, all things considered. No creature's life so brittle, so full of fear, so mad, so furious; only man is plagued with envy, discontent, grief, covetousness, ambition, superstition. Our whole life is an Irish Sea, wherein there is naught to be expected but tempestuous storms and troublesome waves. Literally, *duhkha* means a 'bad hole', as in the center of a wheel. If the center of the wheel is off kilter, it causes disharmony and a rough, uncomfortable ride. This state of unrest and disturbance is a metaphor for the phenomenal life. There is no rest for one who lives a worldly existence. Everything is in a state of chaos; everything is suffering (*duhkha*). Another aspect of *duhkha* is the sense of something missing or incomplete with life. This general sense of anxiety and restlessness with life is intertwined with the other disharmonious aspects of *duhkha*, creating an endless chain that creates more suffering, feeding the fire of discontent. The present paper is an attempt to critically evaluate: 1. Existentialist View of Suffering, 2. Buddhist View of Suffering and 3. Samkhya-Yoga View of Suffering.

Key words: Human Suffering, Samkhya Yoga

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Introduction:

All living beings sought for 'happiness'. We can observe ourselves that it is happiness, the satisfaction of desires and pleasant feelings that we seek. This continual seeking is the most fundamental search. Living beings hope to experience only what is pleasing, while at the same time wishing to avoid the unpleasant and disagreeable. We hope to experience 'happiness' (*sukha*) which is basically pleasant feeling of mind and body. All beings try to avoid all sorts of painful, undesired experiences which may be either mental or physical, called *duhkha*. *Duhkha* is a familiar word in Buddhism.

When one wishes to overcome an enemy, it is necessary to know what he is like, what his characteristics are. Similarly, with *duhkha*, the enemy of our happiness, which we may either try to avoid as much as we can, or strive to overcome, according to our aspiration and the amount of hard work that we are prepared to do on ourselves. Hence, we should take a good look at this *duhkha* to find out what it means and then to see its force in our own lives. It is of no use pretending to ourselves or to others that *duhkha* does not exist, or that it never troubles us. That is the ostrich way of avoiding enemies, and is very ineffective. We have to open our own eyes and understand why we suffer in various ways. When we have admitted to ourselves the weariness of carrying this great burden of pain and sorrow, then we shall be prepared to put it down, to go on our way burden-less and happy.

EXISTENTIALIST VIEW

The existentialist says that man is anguish. Man's nature is of *duhkha*. His life is marked by unease; his mind is a restlessness oscillating between the discomfort of pain and that unrest which men miscall delight. Whatever is felt is included in *duhkha* (*yam kinci vedayitam tam duhkhasmin'ti*). This is echoed today by our leading thinkers - "Human reality therefore is

by nature an unhappy consciousness with no possibility of surpassing its unhappy state".¹

Man's physical survival alone requires the sorrow of ceaseless labor. For the laboring man all his days are sorrows and grief, his heart takes not rest in the night. Modern man sometimes has other choices but the cynical would see little relief. Man's ceaseless labor and ceaseless idleness are still harder. Irregular labor is not pleasant. Few gain real joy from leaving the fruits of their labor to posterity. We shall not see what has posterity ever done for us, this is the thought of most. Therefore, his labor is tainted with futility.

BUDDHIST VIEW

When a child is born, the first thing it does is to cry. It cries because of its expulsion from the womb, which is frightening, and the shock of cold air upon its body simultaneously with the glare of light on its unaccustomed and unfocussed eyes. The new environment irritates its body, and uncertainty, the first shadow of fear, has invaded its consciousness. It is slapped, and gasps for air, and the first cold intake of its lungs is painful. Its cry becomes a howl. It has made its first contact with hard unaccommodating world.

Some infants cry even before their entry into separate existence. They whimper and struggle while still in the womb. Nobody has been able to explain this satisfactorily except those who hold that the unborn child has lived before. Its next sensation is of hunger. The infant begins to be aware of its surroundings.

Buddha undoubtedly went through a period of wondering. That he was well acquainted with every shade of religious and philosophical thought we know from the *Brahmajala Sutta* which outlines them all-some sixty-two theories. He discarded outright the dominant religion of *Brahmanism* because it too perishes on the rock of *duhkha*.

Buddha says life's suffering, that is old age, death, despair, grief and the like briefly denoted by *jara-marana* because there is birth (*jati*).

Dukkha is of three kinds:²

i. *Dukkha-dukkha*: This kind of *dukkha* arises in response to unpleasant physical or mental experiences (often referred to as unpleasant feelings or sensations). The only way to keep *dukkha-dukkha* from arising is to change our response to unpleasant experience. If we can acknowledge unpleasant feelings and sensations, be with them and let them run their course, *dukkha-dukkha* will not arise.

ii. *Sankhara dukkha*: *Sankhara* refers to the intentional formation of thoughts. *Sankhara-dukkha* arises when we go beyond simple aversion to an unpleasant physical or mental experience and engage in stressful mental activity, such as 'should-s' and 'should-not-s', judgments, and anxiety-filled thoughts and questions. *Sankhara-dukkha* has its origin in craving (*tanha*) because that mental activity reflects a craving for things to be how we want them to be.

iii. *Viparinama-dukkha*: Whereas *dukkha-dukkha* arises in response to unpleasant experiences, *viparinama-dukkha* arises in response to pleasant ones. It is tied to impermanence or change. As with the other two kinds of *dukkha*, the origin of *viparinama-dukkha* is craving. When we are enjoying a pleasant experience, we crave for it to continue. In fact, we will go to extremes to keep it going for example, driving too fast, eating too much. *Viparinama-dukkha* arises when, inevitably, the universal law of impermanence leaves that craving unsatisfied.

Certainly man's capacity to think and reason has brought him a long way from his primitive ancestors. But the question is - has it brought him any peace, contentment, or happiness? Man has and is applying his theoretical knowledge to add fuel to the fires of greed and hatred, which can be summed up as *dukkha*.

One of the results of developing man's creative

powers is another widespread form of *dukkha*, an increase in adventitious unease and distress and the reaction of the individual to collateral effects, themselves the result of the preceding causes mentioned above.

SAMKHYA-YOGA VIEW

According to Samkhya, what is sought is the knowledge of the means of terminating misery. If there were no misery, or if misery did not affect us, there would be no such inquiry at all. If, further, such misery could not be removed, the inquiry though possible would be fruitless. It is undisputed that misery does exist. It is three-fold³.

i. Caused by intrinsic influences (*adhi-atmika*), bodily or mental, such as the predominance of bile or phlegm or desire or anger and so on.

ii. Caused by extrinsic natural influences (*adhi-bhautika*), such as other men, beasts and birds or inanimate objects.

iii. Caused by extrinsic super-natural influences such as spirits and so on (*adhi-daivika*).

According to Gaudapada, miseries due to heat and cold, mind and rain etc., are also *adhi-daivika*.⁴ These in their origination are presided over by deities since all these three forms of misery exist in self and there is difference in their location, the locative is taken in the secondary sense of 'caused by that'. That the misery is taken to heart and constitutes a real torment is also undisputed and it is possible to surmount this misery. If misery is patent the means of surmounting it are patent too. For instance, physical disease can be cured by medicine and mental distress by indulgence in pleasures. Enemies may be circumvented by diplomacy and spirits may be won over by charms. Such means are not only patent but also easy. When then this laborious study of a science of freedom from suffering requires prior preparation even for generations. The objection would be valid, if any of the means so patent in experience were either certain or find in its results. However, medicines fail to cure, and fortifications fall and let in the enemy. Diplomacy

is double-edged weapon, and similarly the spirit-charms. Even where they act as desired, they cannot prevent a recurrence of the trouble. He that is cured once is not free from disease ever after. Hence, there is a need for a science to teach us the means of vanquishing suffering, once for all. But experience does exhaust the known means of surmounting suffering. Scripture teaches us other means of sacrifices and so on which surely are infallible.

Therefore, the tendency of the sinful act to produce suffering will have to be counteracted by other means. If not so, counteracted, it will contribute its quota of suffering to the final experience gained by the sacrifice, though that suffering may be negligible as compared with the level of happiness gained. Thus, it is by no means certain that sacrifices bring unalloyed happiness. The results so secured are not permanent. When it is said to be ever-lasting, it means that it lasts for a long while, because, anything which exists and is produced cannot but be impermanent. What is brought into being will necessarily also cease to be. Hence, there is lack of finality. Another defect is that the results vary in degree and each may be surpassed by a higher one, thus giving rise to envy and suffering. One sacrifice leads to Heaven, another to Lordship in Heaven. He who has attained the lesser good will find his bliss changed into misery, at sight of the higher good. Therefore, the knowledge and performance of sacrificial rites cannot lead to the final termination of misery.

Yoga speaks of four different types of *duhkha*. They are:

i. *Parinama-duhkha*: It is based on the principle that everything in this world is subject to the universal law of change. Man who thinks that the objects are permanent and the experiences produced thereof are also permanent, is bound to suffer, for the changed object may give a different kind of experience at a later date.

ii. *Tapa-duhkha*: It arises from the feeling misery and pain generated through man's attachment and aversion towards certain objects. For instance, man prays and works for

possession of objects such as wealth, children etc.

iii. *Samskara-duhkha*: Every experience of certain object or a fact leaves behind an impression in our mind. For example, our experience of visiting beautiful sights leaves an impression of pleasure in our mind and man has a tendency to seek them.

iv. *Guna-duhkha*: It arises from man's lack of discriminative knowledge (*viveka-jnana*) about the true nature and functioning of the *gunas*. The physical body of man and objects of experience are nothing but the complex of the three *gunas* – *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*⁵. The joint functioning of these *gunas* produces the experience of *sukha* or *duhkha*.

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Therefore, we have to seek after the knowledge of the evolved, the un-evolved and the knower⁶. The means for freedom from suffering is the knowledge of reality. In Samkhya and Yoga⁷ it is said that just as the science of medicine consists of four parts: Disease, Cause of disease, Freedom from the disease and Medicine.

Similarly, the science of freedom from suffering also consists of World, Cause of the World, Freedom, and Way to Freedom.

The world is full of misery. The proximity of *prakrti* and *purusa* is the cause of this world. The absolute removal of proximity is freedom from suffering. The means to freedom from suffering is the discriminative knowledge (*viveka-jnana*) between *purusa* and *prakrti* in view of Samkhya⁸ and this can be attained through *astanga-marga*⁹.

It may be argued that the study of *Samkhya* may bring about the release from pain but the same can be achieved by other easy means and hence where is the need to undertake the study. The trouble from other beings or natural elements can be protected against by taking safety measures and the suffering due to planetary forces can be mitigated through recourse to *japa*, worship etc. Even the internal sufferings

can be alleviated by adopting secular measures in order to forget them.

The above said view is rejected because the remedy from all these means are neither certain nor permanent. Since the enquiry into the *Samkhyan* principles and the resultant knowledge from them can alone bring permanent relief from suffering, the study of Samkhya is advised. The means of alleviating pain set down in the *Vedas* are also rejected as they are also subjected to impurity, decay and excess. The *Vedic* means mentioned here are those specified in the *karma-kanda*, that is, Purva Mimamsa and not Vedanta, the Uttara Mimamsa. Samkhya does not accept the concept of Brahman as the absolute reality. *Prakrti* and *purusa* are the two realities of Samkhya. The *Vedic* means are the *yajnas* and other ritualistic practices which do not give permanent release from pain and also involve impure actions like animal-sacrifice. Hence they are rejected as impure and impermanent. Hence, only from the right knowledge of the unmanifest *prakrti*, the manifest evolves of *prakrti* in the form of the gross world and the

purusa, one can get release from pain which is synonymous with *apavarga*, that is *moksa*.

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4. *Gaudapada's commentary on Samkhya Karika II.*
5. *Samkhya Karika XII & XIII.*
6. *drstavat anusravikah, sa hy avisuddhiksaya-'tisaya-yuktah tadviparitah sreyan vyakta-'vyakta-jnavijnanat //Samkhya Karika II.*
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8. *Samkhya Karika II.*
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