

Chapter-V

Conclusion

5.1. Kierkegaard's Concept of Suffering: A Restatement

As we have seen in the previous Chapters, the individual has freedom in suffering which is different in each stage of life. But Kierkegaard emphatically reminds us that freedom acquires meaning only when we can freely choose our true self and realize it and also act accordingly. This stage can be regarded as authentic stage. It is the stage of pure subjectivity. For freedom from suffering or to overcome suffering, self realization is essential and necessary.

Kierkegaard states that subjective understanding of reality is very essential for self-realization. It is necessary for reaching an authentic understanding of the very truth-suffering. Subjective truth is the living truth or fruits of awareness that exist only in the burning fire of subjective experience. When the fire goes out the truth becomes lifeless. Actually, subjective truth requires an indirect transmission that creates in the individual's mind what Kierkegaard calls 'double reflection'. Double reflection refers to the dual process of first understanding a truth intellectually and then relating to it to one's life situation in a manner that gives rise to the subjective understanding of the truth through direct personal experience. Therefore, Søren Kierkegaard regarded suffering as highest subjective truth which can be understood only through self- realization. Through self-realization, suffering will be overcome. According to him, only in religious stage, the individual can choose the true self. In aesthetic stage, the question of self realization does not arise. In ethical stage, the individual has realized, but she/he has to face a very confusing situation of 'either/ or' because of which she/he cannot make real choice. For

realizing the true self or for self realization, the individual has to be free. For Kierkegaard, only a religious person can have the freedom of choice and by choosing her/his true self in the faith of God, she/he can overcome suffering. Only through faith, the individual can take a step towards religion. Faith is to be regarded as essential and necessary for overcome suffering. Because, faith gives the individual to accept what she/he suffers, and also gives the strength to overcome it. Kierkegaard has regarded faith also as the highest subjective truth. Because it is a state of consciousness of the infinite in which one is no longer confined to the perception of the reality imposed by intellectual reality. Actually, faith is a state of passionate surrender to what is rationally doubtful. It is only through 'leap of faith' the human being can commit herself/himself totally to God whose existence is logically and rationally uncertain. According to Kierkegaard, self-realization is the man's highest form of selfhood.

Kierkegaard repeatedly asserted that for self-realization or to be one's true self, it is necessary to become what he termed 'single individual'. And only an authentic being can become 'single individual'. The single individual is central to all areas of his thoughts. At this highest level, the single individual stands alone before God. To be a 'single individual' requires passionate self- commitment to a single purpose in life. To become single individual, it is necessary to realized own self. As a single individual, the individual creates and chooses her/his own values and way of life irrespective of whether or not it harmonizes with the society in which she/he lives. The individual through total commitment can freely choose the fundamental path (faith) in life. This is the key feature of this state of consciousness which gives a sense of consciousness and integrity to her/his existence. As a result, her/his actions become a genuine expression of what she/he

really wants to be doing with her/his existence. Kierkegaard had stated that an essential feature of true selfhood or self-realization is to be clear in mind what one wants to do.

Here, Kierkegaard establishes the co-relation between freedom, authenticity, suffering and self-realization. Freedom means possibility and possibility of future brings the individual to dread and anxiety which causes suffering. Kierkegaard stated that suffering exist in all three stages of life, aesthetic, ethical and religious. But, in aesthetic and ethical stage, the individual is unable to choose the real one and failed to realize her/his true self. For Kierkegaard, only in religious stage, an individual can become fully an authentic being and can realize her/his true self through leap of faith in God. It is to be noteworthy that an individual can be fully free or authentic only in the consciousness of God. Through self realization with the faith in God, the individual can overcome suffering.

Human beings have the freedom to make themselves whichever they want. But because of that desire, most of the humanity is suffering this freedom. We have known that freedom is the man's greatest desire and all causes of suffering can be regarded as the manifestation of freedom. The existence of human being implies the possibility of freedom. The possibility of freedom means possibility of future which brings anxiety to the life of individual. Freedom implies possibility that the individual has to be actualized. When the individual starts to actualize her/his freedom then arise problems which causes suffering. In other words, suffering comes to the individual's life because of their freedom to choice. From that point of view, suffering can be regarded as freedom. But, when the individual comes to know that she/he has been suffering because of incapability of choosing the real one then starts to search her/his real self. By choosing her/his own

self or real one she/he can become authentic where she/he can understand or realize suffering. So, from this point of view, it can be stated that suffering arise from our freedom of choice and also can be eliminated through our authentic choice.

5.2. Kierkegaard's Concept of Suffering: The Individual Self /The Interpersonal Dimension

In establishing the existential link among suffering, subjectivity, authenticity and freedom, Kierkegaard lays bare the interpersonal dimension of the meaning and concept of suffering. The study proposes to understand the interpersonal dimension as situating oneself/individual/person within and on the rock bottom of authenticity to view suffering inter-personally. In other words, suffering as authentic subjectivity and freedom or authentic subjectivity as the source of transcending suffering into freedom is conceived to be moving from the self to the other or broadly to the interpersonal dimension. For Kierkegaard, our own suffering interpersonally awakens us to what the other is going through and it creates in us a compassion through which relieving actions can be motivated. In this continuity of suffering, yet a meaning might be found for our own suffering. Perhaps, suffering that we have in our live can be regarded as meaningful as it teaches us to care for others. Søren Kierkegaard tries to explicate the concept of suffering that can be understood only through self- realization that is possible only through self-reflective thinking.

5.3. Concluding, Suggestive Hints: Schemas of Understanding

In further understanding and situating and elaborating the suggestive range of the concept of suffering the study proposes a 'three level' hermeneutic interpretation as schemas of understanding to situate the question and the concept of suffering in the

existentialist thought of Søren Kierkegaard, of which the first one we have already discussed in the previous section. The first schemas as the first dimension of situating the concept of suffering, framed with Kierkegaardian universe of ideas can be called **the interpersonal**.

From a contemporary point of view, the study proposes to share the insight that the second and third schemas of understanding such as, **1. the other-oriented, and 2. the intercultural**, which are essential to understand Kierkegaard's concept of suffering since adding such a suggestiveness is inevitable. It is an effort to read beyond the text and context of Kierkegaard's engagement with suffering to enrich it with the contemporary context.

5.3.1. The Concept of Suffering: The Kierkegaardian, Camus' and the Levinasian Conglomerate

In explaining and proposing the second dimension and schema of understanding the concept of suffering according to Kierkegaard, that is, 'the other-oriented', the study highlights the key points of difference and reciprocity among Kierkegaard, Camus and Levinas on Faith- Lucidity, Suffering-Consolation and Suffering and Suffering for the Other.¹

In opposition to the view of Kierkegaard that faith in God is the way to overcome suffering, Albert Camus stated that suffering helps us to understand ourselves what we are. He does not want to search any way to get rid of suffering or complete eradication of suffering. According to Kierkegaard, suffering that arise from despair is a state where the individual needs help from outside to get rid of it. But, for Camus, despair is a state where one can know whether he/ she can live with and with that alone. It is not like that

the individual should give up or surrenders in front of his/her suffering and requires help from God. Actually, suffering teaches us how to know oneself as well as how to live by accepting suffering. For Camus, something is not something to be cured; rather we should seek a way to live with suffering. It can be stated that

Lucidity, for Camus is the refusal to lie. I do not want to find anything on the incomprehensible. I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone. Kierkegaard's Anticlimacus speaks of faith as the 'cure' of despair, indeed as its "complete eradication". But for Camus, lucidity requires that we "die unreconciled". As we have noted, for Camus is important is 'is not to be cured', but to seek a way 'to live with one's ailments'².

According to Camus, in spite of the effort to get rid of despair, we have to learn how to resist the will to become nothing. The complete clarity about oneself or consciousness or awareness of oneself is enough for getting rid of pain and suffering. Actually, being unconscious of our despair is the most common human attitude that represents a desire to escape from suffering and live in delusion. When we will being conscious of our despair, pain, suffering, then we will get the courage to accept it and will become able to live life with suffering. It will be possible only when we make the choice of despair over faith. According to Camus, Kierkegaard's discussion of faith shows a picture of a man who is unable to live with her/his pain and suffering and searching a way to get rid of it. But, Kierkegaard rejects that picture of faith as Camus tries to show. For Kierkegaard, get rid of suffering through faith does not mean escape from it, rather it means living with suffering by acceptance. According to Camus,

“Johannes de Silentio (the writer of ‘Fear and Trembling’) is precisely someone who does not make the leap of faith. The ‘knight of faith’ is “incomprehensible to him”. indeed, he is “repelled” and “affronted” and “horrified” by the demands of faith: the knight of faith “appalls my soul”. Johannes has just the “courage”..... . the courage to ‘drain the cup of life’s profound sadness and to accept and live with his ‘pain’ and ‘sorrow’”³.

Though the ideas of Kierkegaard and Camus on Faith and Consolation and Suffering and Lucidity are different, the study, along with Daniel Berthold⁴, thinks that there are many inner nexus which can activate the second dimension of the concept of suffering. Most importantly, beyond the differences in understanding suffering, both have tried to give the way to live life with suffering and have tried to explore the possibility of a way to live that point beyond the meaninglessness of situations. In this regard, Kierkegaard talks about the possibility of life of faith and Camus talks about the life of revolt. It is to be observed that

Kierkegaard writes in his journal that his authorial purpose is ‘not so much (to) mollify (or) reassure, as (to) awaken and provoke men’. Camus too sees the evocation of the absurd in his works as a project of ‘awakening consciousness’ and of ‘provoking what follows’, a ‘definite awaken(ing) consciousness’ and of ‘provok(ing) what follows’ to the possibility of revolt⁵.

Camus talks about life of revolt because suffering teaches us to create a style of life that actually gives us the strength to live in this world. On the other hand, Kierkegaard by

saying the possibility of life of faith for get rid of meaninglessness, despair, suffering; he does not mean the earning of any other future life. Rather, he means the present life belongs to this world. Actually, he wants to show the perpetual striving to live in the face of God. But for Camus, live in the face of God is to become faceless. It means that we admit our incapability of driving our life in our own and cannot transform suffering into a life worth living through our own efforts. Though, they have opposed to accept each other's view, but they try to show the same thing: whether it is through faith in God or without God. Camus uses revolt as a way to get rid of meaninglessness or despair by having strength to live and make life meaningful. Similarly, Kierkegaard uses faith as a capacity to transform our despair or suffering into a life worth living. It can be said that

The difference between Kierkegaard and Camus, 'faith' and 'revolt' become unstable. We can certainly see Kierkegaard's faith as itself an act of revolt: faith is a defiance of the darkness and despair and sense of impotence of the stranger in a strange world, and an insistence on our capacity to live here and now, not in some scared space beyond the void, with grace. Perhaps we can see Camus revolt as a form of leap, insofar as his 'absurd reasoning', like the Kierkegaardian leap of faith, makes the impossible possible by virtue of the absurd: Sisyphus is condemned by the gods to roll his rock up the mountain for an eternity- the symbol of the destiny of each of us who are condemned to live in a world without evident meaning- and yet, paradoxically, he is free, because of the way he chooses to live.⁶

Levinas proposes the provocative theory of the uselessness of suffering. For him, suffering makes no sense; it has no intrinsic teleology, no justification and is of no use. The concept of suffering has been discussed by Levinas in almost all of his major works in its several forms, for example, depersonalization, solitude, the enchainment of the self with itself, finitude, pain, sorrow, sickness and death. Levinas describes the human experience of suffering as, “suffering is, like all lived experience, a given in consciousness”⁷. From here, Levinas takes us to the idea that ‘suffering in the other’ is useless and senseless, but ‘suffering in me’ means my suffering for the sake of other person’s suffering is useful and makes sense. For Levinas, suffering can be useful only in the ethical relation. Therefore, According to Levinas, suffering is intrinsically meaningless. But it can take on meaning in ‘my suffering’ for the suffering of the other person. The fundamental question for Levinas would be how is it possible to transform suffering which is senseless or useless into useful suffering.

Suffering is surely given in consciousness, but this given does not allow itself to be brought into unity. In other words, we can say that it is something that we cannot make into synthesis. Perhaps, we can try to think or imagine about it but we cannot assume or accept.

Integrating the above views, the study proposes to sum up that in the other oriented dimension, our understanding of the concept of suffering offers to engender a quasi transcendental perspective to locate the concept of suffering in the self and the other relationship by virtue of contrasting the interpretative possibility of extending Kierkegaard’s concept of suffering and authenticity to Albert Camus and Emmanuel Levinas in order to suggest that the primary interpersonal dimension of suffering in

the thought of Kierkegaard entails an Other-oriented or the idea of suffering of the Self which begins from the Other. In other words, the suffering in me as the suffering of the self, built-in with faith (in God) according to Kierkegaard , becomes suffering for the Other, which operates as ‘lucidity’(Camus) or Ethical choice for the Other (Levinas).

5.3.2. Suffering: The Intercultural Dimension

By invoking the third dimension of ‘the intercultural’, the study etches out that the concept of suffering according to Kierkegaard engenders and coincides with the contemporaneousness of the concept of suffering with the first two dimensions in situating the concept of suffering.

The contemporaneousness of Kierkegaard’s concept of Suffering has two lineages: One is the present age related crises and the new nature of suffering that they add to our understanding and the other is the theoretical aspect which re-read Kierkegaard. As Sylvia Walsh observes, Kierkegaard has been assimilated into postmodernism in two ways and the philosophy of difference⁸. According to the present study such an interface with the two above mentioned lineages become meaningful it poses such an interface for *the recovery of self through ‘the suffering towards the other’ through culturally locating the self and the other through intercultural dialogue and discourse*. Authenticity and Otherness becomes the key aspect here. As Pius Thomas observes the locus of reference of suffering in Kierkegaard’s thought becomes more than ‘self-authenticity’ and becomes otherness-authenticity, which as he says, has a postmodern orientation. He says,

The later discourses which transcend the modernist/high modernist notions of self as they make the other/otherness lesser and insignificant, however, tried to map the fields of social fragmentation from the divided orientations of self and more divided, contradicting multiple identities. Therefore, the contemporary debates in social theory and democratic theory centre on identity/difference which is portrayed as a 'fractal', which allows only relational definitions. It thus becomes one of the major affirmative claims of what we broadly understand as postmodern/post structural thoughts that as they unsettle the defined meaning attributed to many a conceptual pairs in philosophy. Therein the concept of 'authentic–inauthentic' becomes one of the major casualties. They fragmentize the conceptual integrity of authenticity along with others such as, 'Self–Other', 'Gender–Sex' etc. The possible implosion of the above mentioned concepts and the meaning which they had acquired, however, does not undo them to the 'ground zero' level. In fact, they are being shifted to locales where their import is deconstructed. For instance, the content of the concepts of responsibility and authenticity is being dissipated into the ambiguities related with the formative discourses that determine the self–other relationship. The idea of authenticity is again forced to be leveled on the basis of the ambiguities emerging out of the deconstructive or genealogical ambivalence that shape gender–sex nexus. Metaphorically, the authentic is responsible when it peels off the definitional notion of its self from itself to be reconstituted from the contextual otherness⁹.

Similarly, Charles Taylor in one of his works which appeared in the nineties of the last century called the late-capitalist, contemporary society as reflecting a culture of narcissism and the creative alternative that he proposes to it is a culture of authenticity as the culture of dialogue which makes us define ourselves/our identity against the significant others¹⁰.

The concept of suffering acquires a cultural (Cross-cultural and intercultural) dimension here, as Pius V Thomas points out, “as the authentic self vanishes to be a deconstructive, critical possibility as it rests on concrete otherness. Simultaneously there emerges another line of thinking which attempts to build up such a critique more as a (re) constructive engagement. The insight that guides our discussion then is that the ambiguity generated out of living in contemporary post-traditional societies as it remains stuck between authenticity and otherness has been intercultural in nature. It is so because the intercultural imagination sketches out the ambiguities from the point of view of local/ contextual cultures as they struggle to restore their identity against the global techno-media supra-cultures”¹¹. *Therefore, the ‘self-subjectivity-authenticity-freedom’ paradigm that Kierkegaard works out in understanding the concept of suffering becomes open and oriented to the intercultural other- informed self through the dialogue as close encounters which unravels the moments of failure in self’s effort to gather itself as authentic from the encounter with the concrete and intercultural otherness.*

Notes and References

¹ Daniel Berthold. 'Kierkegaard and Camus: Either/Or?'. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. 73, Issue 2, 2013. 142-147.

² Ibid. 142.

³ Ibid. 143.

⁴ Ibid. 140-147.

⁵ Ibid. 147.

⁶ Ibid. 148.

⁷ Levinas, E. *Useless Suffering, The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking Other*. Ed. Robert Bernasconi & David Wood. London & New York: Routledge, 1988. 156-157.

⁸ Sylvia Walsh. 'Kierkegaard and Postmodernism'. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. 29, No. 2, April. 1991. 114. She also adds that, "Kierkegaard has been probed and appropriated as a forerunner and point of departure for the deconstructive project itself, especially the overthrow of metaphysics and any form of foundationalism. In this group, we find Derrida himself, Blanchot, Deleuze, Mark C. Taylor, and among others. John Caputo, the third author to be considered here. What is it these writers see in Kierkegaard that so attracts them to him? Foundationally, I think, it is two elements, irony and the concept of repetition, both of which are central to Kierkegaard's early pseudonymous writings and perhaps to his authorship as a whole, though the term 'repetition' virtually drops out of Kierkegaard's later works and irony becomes, at least as construed in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, a border category or 'boundary zone' between the aesthetic and the ethical stages of life and an incognito within the ethical".

⁹ Pius V Thomas. 'Between Authenticity and Otherness: Habermas and the Concept of the Experience of Life in Contemporary Philosophical Discourse'. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 1, No. 2, December, 2010. 94

¹⁰ Charles Taylor. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1991. 30-33

¹¹ Pius V Thomas. 'Between Authenticity and Otherness: Habermas and the Concept of the Experience of Life in Contemporary Philosophical Discourse'. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol. 1, No. 2, December, 2010. 95.