

Good essay about patanjalis diagnosis of suffering

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Introduction

One aspect of human life that deeply interested Patanjali was suffering. Patanjali was particularly interested in how humans can awaken and free themselves from suffering. The concept of suffering can be found in his famous text known as Yoga Sutras. In this text, suffering is referred to as "duhkham." Patanjali uses the term duhkham to synonymize all the disturbances that take place within the human equilibrium. These range from feelings of unhappiness or disquiet to big heartbreak. Simply, duhkham encompasses feelings of anger, anxiety, sadness, unhappiness and even devastation. This paper aims to explore Patanjali's perspective and diagnosis of suffering. The paper will look at the causes of suffering that are given by Patanjali. These causes will be looked at one by one. The paper will also discuss the justifications given by Patanjali in regards to these causes. The application of Patanjali's assertions to a modern setting will accompany these discussions. The premise of the paper is to show that just as Patanjali shows in his text, 'Yoga Sutra,' suffering is indeed built in into the very fabric of a human being's everyday experiences.

In layman's view, the causes of suffering are pretty simple and straightforward. If a common person was asked what are the things in life that cause suffering, some of the probable answers would include disease, poverty, death, and so on. However, Patanjali offers a different view of the concept of suffering and the causes of suffering. According to Patanjali, there are four primary causes of suffering in human beings. These causes are:

- Ignorance or rejection of our infinite nature
- Egotism

- Attachment to things that bring pleasure
- Clinging to bodily security, by aversion to things that dwell or bring bodily pain
- Fear of mortality, i. e. the desire on to life by all means

The first cause of suffering according to Patanjali is the ignorance of who we really are as human beings. In simple terms, human beings have a habit of ignoring their infinite nature (Thakar, 2010). Spiritually speaking, humans are divine beings that will hypothetically never die. The human minds however work in a very funny manner and can in fact comparable to a sieve. The mind forgets the things that it has learnt quickly, no matter how important or amazing this information might be. According to Patanjali, the only secret to overcoming such ignorance is to be constantly in wonder about this unconscious state. This is bound to awaken awareness in the human mind. Simply put, curiosity about this ignorance will awaken one from the unremitting delusions and illusions that the human mind constantly falls into almost every day (Thakar, 2010). With the right amount of awareness, one can be able to stop being led by the unconscious ignorance including fabricated delusions and, therefore, tap fully into one's infinite nature (Shearer, 2002).

In the modern world, a common phrase states, "ignorance is bliss". The literal meaning of this phrase is that if one is unaware of something, one inadvertently does not have to worry about it. This phrase is a direct contradiction to Patanjali's concept of ignorance. Patanjali suggests that it is such ignorance that contributes to the suffering of human beings while the phrase seemingly connotes that what you do not know will not hurt you.

Patanjali is however the right one in this regard because as various human situations will prove, many are the times that we as humans ignore warning signs about potential disasters only for them to come and haunt us later. In simple terms, the human mind often forgets the small things that might be used to avert a larger situation that brings suffering, and it is only when the real suffering comes in that we remember that we could have averted it (Coward, 2002).

The second cause of suffering given by Patanjali is attachment to things that are based on pleasure. This may include people and even objects. Patanjali contends that as long as human beings believe that the fulfilling the desire for earthly pleasure is the key to happiness, there will always be an element of suffering in human beings (Thakar, 2010). This argument would without be met with a lot of skepticism since there are many people that believe they can derive authentic happiness from material things or interpersonal relationships. Patanjali justifies his argument by stating that desires for pleasure rise and fall continuously. It is the attachment to these desires that lead to suffering. One does not essentially need to fulfill these desires to experience pleasure (Shearer, 2002). Within the core of a human's infinite nature is a sort of blissful and limitless energy, which transcends the simple pleasures that are created by egotistic desires. According to Patanjali, when one lets go of all ego-based desires, a space is created for fulfillment manifestations to take place almost effortlessly. Consequently, there is zero chance of one enduring suffering. As mentioned earlier, there are many people, however, who may not necessarily agree with Patanjali especially in regards to interpersonal relationships. For instance, many who believe that

family brings one true and authentic happiness. While this may be true, it wise to remember that family may itself become a source of suffering when the family bond is broken and because of the serious attachment had on it, one goes through a state of suffering, for instance through loneliness. This is also very applicable to male, female relationships including marriage.

The third cause of suffering given by Patanjali relates to egoism. An unhealthy relationship with one's ego is a source of suffering (Shearer, 2002). When one's mind becomes too attached and too over-identified with ideas that in actual sense limit one's infinite being, the body mind essentially contracts and then experiences a form of stuckness (Shearer, 2002). Such an unhealthy relationship occurs when identification with a particular notion or idea becomes stronger than one's connection with his or her infinite nature. This is comparable to a situation whereby one's ego creates the notion or idea that he or she must be better than another person or he or she must be right always. Such an ego element can produce feelings of inferiority, which comprise suffering. From Patanjali's perspective, it emerges that the ego is not merely a means of self-respect but is rather a virtue, which when unchecked can lead to suffering (Coward, 2002).

The other source or cause of suffering according to Patanjali is clinging to bodily security, by aversion to things that dwell or bring bodily pain.

Generally speaking, human have been naturally conditioned to avoid pain to prevent untimely demise of this species. This is quite appropriate because it ensures that the human race survives, for instance, when one is being pursued by a dangerous animal. On the other, hand, however, the human mind also spends a considerable amount of time attempting to avoid

situations that that can create emotional or mental pain (Thakar, 2010).

Patanjali contends that the ego quite foolish. The ego has a notion that it cannot in any way bear an discomforting experience and consequently attempts to eliminate every perceivable painful experience even when the methods that it tries to eliminate the painful discomforts with are not entirely foolproof (Iyengar, 2002). In simple terms, one's ego becomes so wrapped up in efforts to avert this pain that one forgets about his or her infinite nature, and this obviously results in suffering.

The final cause of suffering that Patanjali forwards is the human's fear of mortality/death, and the desire on to life by all means (Shearer, 2002). The fear of death is both a programmed and instinctual response that is taught by the current society. Even though, it is quite natural for one to step out of the way of danger such as a speeding car, most of the hanging on to life element in humans is a result of mind illusions. Occurrences or situations like divorce; job loss may be unconsciously interpreted by the human mind as life threatening. This hanging on to life results into much suffering, since the human ego is constantly at work to protect itself from physical, mental and emotional survival. According to Patanjali, this suffering can only be transcended by remembering who one really is (Shearer, 2002). One is much more than just mind and body. Even after the death of the body mind, one's divine spiritual essence continues existing. When one's realizes this truth, he or she stops hanging on to life and naturally starts accepting everything that happens and in the process, deeper feelings of safety and security become rife in one (Shearer, 2002).

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is clear that suffering is, in fact, embedded into every human fabric and constitutes every element of his experience and existence.

Patanjali clearly conveys this message in yoga sutras. He gives five distinct causes of human suffering that are ignorance, egoism, attachment to things that bring pleasure, clinging to bodily security, and fear of mortality. It is however shown that for each of these causes, it is possible for humans to avoid them and hence prevent themselves from unwarranted suffering.

Personally, I fully agree with Patanjali's diagnosis of suffering because all the reasons that he gives are indeed very practical, and a deeper analysis of them shows that their avoidance could in real sense alleviate human suffering.

References

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