

## A Philosophical View Towards Nostalgia

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*Abstract: Most of our psychological problems, according to Sigmund Freud, originate with our childhood traumatic experiences. One of the easily said than done remedies suggested is to impartially recall the unfortunate and rather a sequence of painful events for a fair analysis. However while advancing in life there is always a likelihood of the interference of certain admixtures of experiences which can easily hinder the desired spontaneity of the process. Therefore for a researcher also it should not merely be an apparent study or presentation of a statistical or graphical analysis. On the other hand there should be a proper scope facilitated to the liberal psychological outlook to cover all relevant parameters. If exclusively a scientific approach to life is held then it would fail to cover and cognize different states of visceral anguish.*

*Nostalgia by itself conveys a yearning for a past that can in no way be redeemed and in a way has been over-idealized. Usually the owner somehow finds a typical psychological shelter and security with pleasure in continually referring to it. So long as this trait is practised in a casual way it does no harm as conventionally construed. But the moment it is looked upon as a contrast to the present extant scenario, the self-inflicted trouble shoots up. The person is bound to underestimate the present which according to him is unalterable and much owing to that there is not even a reasonable hope for the future. As a result life comes to a standstill and becomes a misery. Melancholy creeps in stealthily and slowly gets nurtured. Obviously there is no other way out than to look back to the past for solace. Is there not any remedy for this? There are surely many suggestive approaches in vogue. One of them is taking on a philosophical view that can bring us pretty close to the reality and help in transforming the situation.*

**Keywords: Traumatic experiences, Graphical analysis, Melancholy, Philosophical approach**

### I. INTRODUCTION

There are different frameworks used to understand the term nostalgia but the psychiatric framework is probably the most commonly employed method for various case studies. A typical tendency, usually granted at large only to human beings is to voluntarily fall back on select memories and subsequently feel comforted. However, results indicate that it may not be a cent percent thoroughly satisfying process because there are more chances of having even a certain undesirable set of memories leading almost to an irreversible depression. Of course, there may be an attempt by the owner to distill out only the positive or soothing ones but the onslaught of negative feelings or destructive emotions cannot totally be ruled out. Much owing to this an attempt to recall the childhood memories might include a single poignant memory while surfacing and finally get resolved into

numerous components. Friedrich Nietzsche says, "The things of the past are never viewed in their true perspective or receive their just value; but value and perspective change with the individual or nation that is looking back on its past."

Therefore, Nostalgia in true sense is a consistent longing for an idealized past. It is a self-satisfying tendency owing to which it does not harp after social accreditation. Rather it should be recognized as a private affair. Human nature relies mostly on this natural inclination partially or wholly for a short duration. Reasoning the past, complaining of the present and speculating the future with wishful thinking beyond limit is quite common to human nature, unless someone is an evolved being. Philosophically speaking just as we have no control on the past and therefore cannot redeem it, we also do not have much scope to reorganize the existing reality in the present. This is in no way an attempt to subscribe or synchronize all feelings to fatalistic attitude. As such,

generally the idealized emotions search for a reorganized platform to seek happiness. It could be animate or even inanimate objects too. That would also prove to be the sole reason to easily become nostalgic for certain chosen objects, tastes, smells, sounds etc. having experienced in childhood or any other phase of life. The urge to build the past in the present scenario is indeed a Herculean task almost improbable but that itself becomes a driving force. But then scientifically nothing goes without opposition. There cannot be any feeling without a cause or sense. The opposing force maybe infinitesimally small, yet it cannot be ignored because it is an acknowledged entity. Therefore human mind races for choice memories to get a feeling of complacency but as such it is extremely difficult to prune everything with perfection.

## II. BACKGROUND

With regard to the Theories of human Nature it can be seen that many philosophers in past have tried to deal with it in a critical manner without taking into consideration the different strata of the society. There had been lesser reference made to the circumstances wherein a person is stationed while to the contrary an idealistic picture is drawn. For example in Buddhism a lot of impetus is placed on human nature which is always conscious and tending towards desire while Judeo-Christian approach is to indicate Free Will as the essential ingredient, Plato thought rather surmised human beings as rational as well as social animals, Aristotle preferred to keep both body and soul together as essential parts of human nature, Darwin thought human being with progression and improvised states as an exclusive form of the primates, for those adhering to the Atheistic concepts felt no sense in crediting all the qualities as declared by many because it is the existence that precedes essence-which is same as claimed in the Atheistic Existentialism. However from psychological point of view it is Freud who explains everything on the basis of Id, ego and Superego meaning thereby that it is always a clash which boosts the human nature or the continuing conflict between the conscious and unconscious mind, which is finally appeased by the guilt within. So the rational approach or analysis is definitely required to reshape the over idealistic picture presented or to prune the theories that were stuffed with excesses.

The term Nostalgia was in fact first introduced in 19<sup>th</sup> century by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer. It was rather coined to refer to the then extant conditions to suit the mentality of the mercenaries, who were far away from their homes. It also dealt partially to cover the physical conditions. But then as decades rolled on it was deviated from this view to make an entry into the psychological arena. Naturally the visible symptoms were recorded from psychological and physiological effects. Travelling into unknown areas and never getting a feel of settlement, must have induced homesickness and an urge to return to homeland. As anyone could have, there was a normal reaction from the mercenaries to express directly or indirectly continuous anxiety, periodical bouts of depression, insomnia and even temptation towards attempting suicide. Thankfully a scientific viewpoint was proposed on the basis of fluctuations taking place in Nature. It

has been proved centuries back the flights of moods can be reasoned out by the study of Nature which is governed by certain potential factors. Just as variety foods have a bearing on our disposition, the external factors like pressure and temperature can also show their hold. The atmospheric pressure with its variation and temperature touching extremes season wise can surely make the person feel elated or depressed. Human moods though respond through continually to the climatic conditions. Similarly the flow of blood may also be affected by these factors. As a result physical parameter like constitution as a whole can also cause variation. From medical science it is proved that the migration of blood molecules from heart to brain could be the major underlying reason to result into the state of mind, which we think as mood. Carl Becker in his address to the American Historical Association in 1931 about common man said, "Those things which can be related to some reasonable degree of relevance and harmony to his idea of himself and what he is doing in the world and what he hopes to do...the history which he imaginatively recreates as an artificial extension of his personal experience will inevitably be an engaging blend of fact and fancy a mythical adaptation of that which actually happened."

## III. NON-NOSTALGIC STATE

It is a fact that the intensity of feeling nostalgic for some reason for a certain spell differs widely from person to person. In fact it is directly proportional to the personal culture imbibed by the owner. One who is ignorant of this shade of personality may remain in a way quite safe. We have to accept the fact that percentage wise non-nostalgic state has greater and wider space to occupy in routine life. When compared, the non-nostalgic state may even prove to be negligible also. Therefore it is necessary to make a demarcation between memory and nostalgia. When we are reminded of the past exclusively for a reference it may be concluded as memory. On the other hand, when we get a feeling that rejection of the present in preference to the past is necessary it would mean a nostalgic inclination. In view of Christopher Lasch, "just as we should reject the thoughtless equation of progress and hope, so we need to distinguish between nostalgia and the reassuring memory of happy times which serves to link the present to the past and to provide the essence of continuity... strictly speaking nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all, since the past it idealizes stands outside time, frozen in unchanging perfection... It sees past present and future as continuous. It is less concerned with loss than with our continuing indebtedness to a past the formative influence of which lives on our patterns of speech, our gestures, our standards of honor, our expectations, our basic disposition toward the world around us"

Many theories or viewpoints regarding Nostalgia have been proposed and only a select few of them are in vogue. Therefore a general broad classification is necessary. Some of them are clearly oriented towards or firmly attached to the past while others remain clinged to the present. Sociologically it is a proven fact that even when we advance in life at any stage past cannot be totally detached from the present in any walk of

life nor life can be presented in separate blocks for perusal. It is a continuous process owing to which the connection within can never become defunct. It should be construed as a sentimental connection and therefore a universal reality. At times it is equated to melancholy which is a partial truth. Yearning for the past is but a natural human propensity. Although most of the times Nostalgia is related to the mental plane only there are occasions where we experience or realize that it can be strongly evoked on physical plane too by various stimuli like smell, touch and sight. Therefore Nostalgia could be positive as well as negative. Nostalgia, according to Fred Davis, "always occurs in the context of present fears, discontents, anxieties or uncertainties even though those may not be in the forefront of the person's awareness."

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It has been observed that majority of the theories related to Nostalgia somehow throw more light on the cause and theoretical classification. The theories also prefer to look to the negative aspects more. It has been almost equated to a disease or self-inflicted pain or mental affliction. It is concluded as a weakness than a natural tendency. Is there not any deliverance from it?

There could be two views. Scientifically, it could be a form of energy surfacing once a while or periodically taking control of the mind. No form of energy can ever be created or destroyed, which is a universal truth drawn from the principle of conservation of energy. Therefore changing the form of energy for a healthy personality could be a thermodynamic solution. There are so many types of available energies, and so by interconversion principle it might help. We don't have any control on the climatic conditions which could drastically alter without prior notice and therefore, instead of eliminating them, efforts should be directed towards getting acclimatized with them. Philosophically speaking it is the sensitive people who suffer voluntarily and also those who derive pleasure out of this propensity to get a sort of comfort privately. One who leads life idealistically has many expectations from life and

therefore an array of disappointments are bound to queue up in practical life. Every decade poses different problem or same problems differently. If this existential reality is not accepted sportingly then the present as well as future will have very little scope to bring forth joy and comfort. Being a diehard optimistic or pessimistic will only arrest the growth of feelings and the person will ever remain with fractured feelings. Therefore if melioristic approach is adopted that too willingly then there is always a living hope. One can pull out only the inspiring and comforting feelings from the past and remain away from the possible negative feeling and melancholy. With this nostalgia shall have a positive aspect and would doubtlessly be an energy worth retaining and utilizing whenever necessary. Every behavioural science proposed as a model approach is always with an attempt to draw happiness. However absence of unhappiness does not assure or result into happiness. There are occasions when we do find neither of these with us. Yet that also cannot be considered as tranquility in the practical sense. To conclude as Arthur Schopenhauer thinks the root cause of all this is the blind Will which arises from want and in turn surfaces because of deficiency. Therefore according to Schopenhauer, "So long as we are the subject of willing we can never have lasting happiness nor peace."

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