

SUFFERING: AN OUTCOME OF RELIGIO-POLITICAL STORIES IN HISTORY

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Abstract

Humans, collectively as a species, have evolved through stories. Storytelling which began with the history of myths have now ended up in fictionally legalized stories such as religion, politics, economics, courts, prisons, trade, stock markets etc. Stories lay undistinguished from reality as humans live in the hyperreal world. We have lost reality in exchange for fiction. Though stories have given rise to innovation and technology, they have also become the root cause of most of our sufferings, since the dawn of Homo sapiens. Before the evolution of Homo sapiens, all other species lived, suffered and died in reality. Now we live most of the time in stories, suffer and die in reality. Suffering is inevitable in order to survive, irrespective of all species but suffering for the sake of something that does not really exist is surprising and dangerous. Religion and Politics, being the breeding ground for stories set up the stage for humans to involve in something that does not exist in tangible reality yet will allow them to suffer and sometimes even die in reality. Suffering, here, becomes a choice and is avoidable if the stories are replaced with stories that propagate peace.

Keywords: Fiction, Reality, LGBTQ, Storyteller, Suffering, Religion

Homo sapiens evolved culturally and morally through stories. Without stories, Homo sapiens are equal to all other species in the world. “Humans think in stories rather than in facts, numbers, or equations, and the simpler the story, the better” (Harari, 21 Lessons for the 21st Century 3). We have the ability to imagine about things, material or nonmaterial but we also have the capability to imagine about things that do not really exist. If we can imagine a white unicorn with no much effort, we can also imagine a piece of paper called money or a god who has given his divine rights to the kings to rule the commoners or a patriot who is worth dying for his country’s sake. Stories, along with the human beings, have evolved depending on the eras. Several stories exist and each of them who created the stories are long gone by but the stories still continue to rule the world. The characters in the stories are replaced but not the stories as such. In most of the countries, kings and queens are now replaced by presidents or prime ministers. We imagine our rulers differently than before, we don’t imagine them drafting war plans, at least not with chariots pulled by horses anymore. If we keenly observe the pattern in history, the early fictitious stories are only replaced by new ones. The underlying point is that we are still dependent on stories and we are not aware of what new ones could hold in store for us. “The way we experience story will evolve, but as storytelling animals, we will no more give it up than start walking on all fours” (Gottschall 200). We cannot predict the future since the stories do not have any rules. Most of the stories we live in are dependent on power. Who will suffer, how many will suffer and why they have to suffer depend on who is in power. Some of the stories have turned out favorable but mostly it has led to suffering of many. Stories continue to exist even if people suffer or die. If the stories bring order and peace in the world without victimizing anyone, then the fiction might not be a debatable topic. As fiction is loaded with sufferings, it is the dire need of the hour to discuss the cause of the sufferings in history and how we can prevent ourselves from falling a prey to these powerful stories.

Suffering, Politics and Chaos:

Suffering, since decades, had been part of philosophical or scientific debates. Suffering is a part of evolution but evolution is not responsible when stories created by Homo sapiens cause suffering. Events like suffering seem to happen randomly but there is an order to each of the deadliest sufferings that we witness in reality. There are several linear or nonlinear causes for any event to happen. If the cause is non traceable, it simply means that humans are incapable of finding them due to the complex interconnections within the system. To quote one of the obvious examples in history is the Taiping Rebellion which lasted for almost fourteen years that resulted in deaths of more than twenty million

people. It began with a civil service candidate's failed attempts to clear his exam that eventually led to his artful way of convincing people to believing in a religious story that will get him power. Hong Xiuquan, a desperate aspirant started a separate kingdom against the ruling dynasty that led to the sufferings of millions. A shocking declaration of his vision of himself as the brother of Jesus Christ is the story that captivated his followers into believing him as the leader. If such an irrational story could trigger a war and bring deaths of several millions, history is full of such stories. "Humans think they make history, but history actually revolves around this web of stories" (Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* 181). To deconstruct what we had been witnessing as history is to understand that all these stories exist only in our imagination except for the millions who suffered and died. "Yet the only place where such universal principles exist is the fertile imagination of Sapiens, and in the myths they invent and tell one another. These principles have no objective validity" (Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* 108).

Suffering, Religion and Chaos:

Religion is one of the significant examples in history to understand the power of stories and storytellers. Thousands of religions have confidently formed without any perturbations and still continue to sustain in this postmodern world. Each religious story has multiplied to form several stories and lot of people have suffered and died for the sake of religion. In spite of sufferings and deaths, religions have still continued to exist which indicate that stories are all powerful and can create wars and stop wars too. Most of the wars in history have begun with stories such as the need to fight for our society, kingdom, and country when everything such as maps and boundaries are just fictions created by the powerful few. We take a backseat in analyzing the causes for these nightmarish pages we read since it is history. However, it is dangerous if we realize the truth that we are already puppets in someone else's stories and we are still not aware of what reality is.

Women were often suppressed in history and history is a strange display about men and their power. One of the stories that resulted in the oppression of women in Christianity was God's curse on Eve, "I will increase your trouble in pregnancy and your pain in giving birth. In spite of this, you will still have desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him" (Good News Bible: With Deutrocanonical Books 3). By evolution, women need to undergo the pain to bring a new life to this world but the story pins down to Eve's unrighteousness and God's rightful punishment for her deed. Several countries have also criminalized the LGBTQ community and the victims there suffer. "Homosexual men and women in India get married to people of opposite sex in order not to be outed, and not to be ostracized" (Rao 57). In reality, the early man made stories were created for their selfish needs. The result of stories are victimization of women and homosexuals. These fictitious stories that are still being told and retold in the churches cause suffering till today. The stories remained intact within the church walls until after sometime they were extended to courts where the laws mirror what the Bible says. Like the story of divinity bestowed on the kings and the religious priests, everything that they did were always given a divine twist so that the commoners would fear god's punishment and obey what they declare. There are several other stories from Bible that have been adopted in other fictitious stories. The bitter truth is that women are still suppressed by the patriarchy and homosexuality is still considered illegal or at least not accepted in most cultures or societies. In this regard, the postmodern world is only a repetition of history, but may be with different kinds of suppression tools than before.

Slavery, like the history of women, have originated in stories as well. Some of the stories revolved around justifying the reasons for enslavement of one particular group and not any other. The hierarchy that existed among the early ancestors introduced the culture of slavery so that the powerful few can enjoy the resources undividedly. Slaves were brutally treated by those who owned them. Several attempts to discard these stories went futile since these fictitious hierarchical structures were ingrained deeply in their minds and it allowed the few to enjoy all resources undividedly. The story of slavery in America had existed in spite of the Emancipation Proclamation Act and till today the impact of slavery is seen in some parts of the country. The story that stigmatizes the colour of the skin to the level of intelligence and morality leave the victims suffering till today. If this immoral and irrational story has consumed people's minds for several years, the power of stories and its impact in reality are a frightening combination that can bring back the slavery system anytime in future.

Conclusion:

Suffering, by nature, exists in reality, but the cause of suffering in the history of Homo sapiens are the infinite fictitious layers wrapped in every human mind. When we listen to a story, we imagine everything for real and once the story is complete, we either have the impact or we tend to ignore it. In this, nobody suffers but when these stories are incorporated into reality, the stories as such do not suffer but the people suffer. “If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin” (Darwin 503). Every institution, which we see in history and which we live in, was once a story that was orally passed on from one generation to the other. However, some of the stories remain universal such as wars, money, religion etc. This imagined reality had started with a purpose but the suffering has led to a complete imbalance between the powerful and the powerless. Stories have streamlined the whole world and in fact have united the world through culture, religion, technology etc. but have also brought several unreasonable hierarchies such as man/woman, rich/poor, west/east and many more. In this postmodern era, there are still the powerful storytellers who exploit the others by using their manipulative storylines. These storylines make up an unforgettable history in future where currently, we are made to believe that these sufferings are part of all our lives and that we need to confront them bravely. This in reality is not the law of nature but an outcome of the human made stories. Other species, apart from humans suffer but the cause is not fictional. Human minds are capable of adaptation and change which benefit the storyteller. This makes the humans believe in any dramatic change such as the inversion of laws or the sudden shift of power in politics or an updated version of the early religious books. Those in power, the religious and the politicians have certainly had a hand in making the humans believe that God would punish humans if they do not obey the rulers. This, in other words, means that any rule, favorable or unfavorable to the commoners, passed by the rulers must be obeyed. And till today, humans need to obey the laws despite their irrationality. The way the humankind suffers is strangely different from the way other species suffer, except for the suffering caused by humans on animals. We suffer from stories whereas other species suffer from reality.

If the whole country suffers from poverty, famine and drought, it is because someone wants to. It is more dreadful than we imagine the future to be. The cause of the rapid progress of civilization and technology are the powerful stories which enable humans to process everything faster and easier. When humans are made to believe that the Artificial Intelligence can know a human better than any human, the choice to switch from dependence on humans to computer algorithms seems convenient. In reality, it cannot compensate the subjective feelings that a human has. Though humans realize that someday soon the algorithms will start overpowering humankind, none can get back to the Stone Age. The reliance on technology such as the Artificial Intelligence cannot be dialed down anytime in future whether or not there will remain a small group of people who are either unaware or biased. The ratio of the dependence on stories have only increased but not decreased. Stories have only evolved and with those stories evolved the degrees of sufferings of humankind. There are less chances of a country being colonized by another in a battlefield, however, a biological or cyber warfare is most likely to happen. The way humans now suffer versus how they suffered before might be different but suffering is not a random act and it clearly has a causal effect that pins down to few humans who wanted power over the rest. The underlying truth is that there is no suffering that has happened randomly as each page of the history’s suffering begins with a story. “All forms of randomness involve certain boundary conditions. Beyond that boundary, the unpredictability may end, repetitions and patterns may begin” (Roszak 110).

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