



Guilt Proneness Leading To Prosocial Behaviour In Jose Saramago's Blindness:

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Abstract:

The article addresses the concept of guilt Proneness which in turn leads to Prosocial Behavior with regard to Jose Saramago's novel, Blindness. The characters in the novel are subjected to various dreadful situations and are forced to go against their moral consciousness resulting in their guilt Proneness. The novel so far is analysed by adaptation theories and humanitarian ideologies. The interdependency of guilt and behaviourism in the novel is not widely acknowledged. This notion is brought to light with the analysis of various incidents taking place in the novel.

Keywords: Blindness, Guilt Proneness, Prosocial behaviour.

José de Sousa Saramago is a renowned contemporary Portuguese writer. He was also the recipient of the Nobel prize in 1998. His works are distinct in their blend of irony and parable drawing the readers to an imaginary untrodden world. His writings have a unique style and form with the usage of long sentences sometimes even continuing for a page. Most of his works show empathy towards humankind and the characters are usually caught in the struggle to maintain their relationship.

The novel, Blindness portrays the life of humans in a post-apocalyptic world wherein the characters suddenly lose their eyesight. The situation gets even worse when blindness becomes a contagious disease. The chaos brought about by this sudden disease is the driving force of the novel. The novel focuses on the life of a few characters who are brought together for quarantine in a mental asylum. These characters are not referred to by any proper name but by words with some peculiar attachment to their traits or profession. The life in the asylum and the complete shattering of human civilization due to the pandemic situation are the major themes of the novel. Though the situation is resolved at the end of the novel, the readers are given a clear picture of how the world would be turned if anything out of ordinary happens in the nature of our being. The characters in the novel undergo certain situations which make them susceptible to do things against their moral consciousness. These actions lead to guilt-proneness which further make the characters vulnerable along with their pandemic life. As a means of escaping their guilt-proneness, they involve in prosocial behaviour as that might absolve them of their guilty nature. Prosocial behaviour is the nature of helping or benefitting others voluntarily. The way of helping can be of anyway – sharing, comforting, rescuing or even supporting. This behaviourism is one of the finest virtues of human beings but not many follow it.

There are many instances in the novel wherein the guilty prone nature of the characters lead them in the path of prosocial behaviour.

The thief in the novel is one among the people who were affected initially by blindness. He lost his sight due to the close contact he had with the first blind man. However, if he hasn't plotted the plan to steal things from a blind man he might have not been attacked by the blindness. In the mental asylum, when the internees were queued to locate the lavatory, the thief laid hands over the woman with dark glasses in a way of quenching his lustful urges. This is a great mistake done by any man as touching girls without their permission is strictly offensive. And the thief taking advantage of the blindness to abduct her is highly condemnable. As a result of his cheap action, the thief was in return wounded severely by the woman with dark glasses. In the course of the novel, the thief's health was deteriorating and his wound became grievous. In this situation, there comes a conversation between the woman with dark glasses and the thief wherein each are confessing about each other's mistake. It is clear that the thief was guilty and the woman with dark glasses punished him for his mistake. However, the guiltiness that they both felt for their actions changed their way of approaching each other. The woman with dark glasses regretted her action of wounding the thief whereas the thief instead of blaming the woman with dark glasses for her vengeful action that made his condition grave was consoling her as guiltless. This change of behaviour supporting each other is a result of grieving their guilt. Earlier, the thief and the woman with dark glasses were blaming each other for their misfortune and this behaviour completely changed after they underwent the guilt-proneness. This is an example of prosocial behaviour. It might not be a great help to each other but consoling one to feel guiltless is itself a great help and comes under prosocial behaviour.

The woman with dark glasses lost her sight with the contact of the first blind man in the hospital. Her moment of losing sight is completely contrasting with the other cases. After her being brought to the asylum, she maintained a good relationship with everybody, especially the doctor's wife. However, the incident with the thief made her undergo various grievances. She initially was confident of her action that the thief deserved her wounding treatment but gradually when she witnessed the torments he underwent, her state of mind about her punishment changed drastically. She thought her self justice was no further a justice but a sin. She felt bad for her actions and accepted them as mistakes despite the mistreatment she had from the thief. Her constant guilt-proneness after the death of the thief might have made her attitude completely change that the woman who attacked a man to have touched her then allowed men in the ward to have physical intimation with her. She did that voluntarily believing it could give some random happiness in that horrible situation of quarantine. This change of attitude – the mind trying to give comfort to others is a behaviour.

The sergeant and a few soldiers were given orders to contain the internees inside the mental asylum. They were told that the blindness was contagious and the blind people trying to escape the quarantine needed to be eradicated. The sergeant wouldn't have faced such a mission as to kill the innocents trying to break out of their quarantine. With the fear of being affected with blindness and the humanity that's swinging on the other part of them, the soldiers had a tough time maintaining their orders. The sergeant is a peculiar one among the soldiers, he shows two different contrasting personalities in the novel. He was shown as an emotionless figure in the initial pages with the death of the thief and a few others, later his kindness was shown with him guiding the blind internees to take in food inside the asylum. The killing of the thief and a few others surely would have impacted the sergeant. The killing wasn't done for an enemy but for their people who were guilty for their blindness. To be blind is not a treacherous or evil thing but in that scenario, only fate could be blamed. The sergeant though was only following his orders, his part of humanity would have been affected by his actions of responsibility. The transition or the surprise of the sergeant's character is revealed in a scene of the novel where the soldiers were misleading a blind man into a trap. The blind man following the words of guidance provided by the soldiers walked with complete fear of being shot. He could sense a misleading tone from the soldier and feared that any wrong step could get a bullet on his body. The soldier guiding the blind man no way could have realised the mistake he was doing. Being blind and starving to death isn't a thing to be played off with laughter or mockery. This mistake was understood by the sergeant who rightly stopped the misguidance of the soldier. He then further guided the blind man patiently and kindheartedly. This was a surprise turn on the sergeant's character as his previous traits have been numb without feelings and blindly following orders. The readers never get to know the human side of the sergeant until this particular scene in the novel. The sergeant's previous stern being and the loss of Innocent lives on his watch would have turned on his humanity part. The sergeant stopping the misleading soldier and guiding back the blind man is prosocial behaviour.

The women in the novel are given more significance than the men. This significance doesn't come by the easy and major roles performed by them but by the love and sacrifice they did that can be seen throughout the novel. There were a few blind hoodlums who stole the food packages and blackmailed the other internees to provide their valuables to get their food packages. Struck with the situation and helplessness, the internees agreed and gave away their valuables to get their food packages. However, once all the valuables were given and nothing else was left with the internees to pay for the food, the handlooms asked for the women as payment. This is the most striking horror of the whole novel. One can imagine the situation the women were left with. At this particular time, the women who have been so far devoted to their husbands took an unexpected path for the sake of other internees. The nature of guilt played huge importance at that time because if the women doesn't agree to give up their bodies to the hoodlums, they would become the sole responsibility for the starving of the other internees. It was a situation of either do or die. The women were ready to sacrifice themselves in order to save the other fellow blind men. The sacrifice was not any ordinary one but the most fearful nightmare any woman will even dare to think of. To become prey for the lustful creatures surrounding them is the decision made by the women to save the internees and also to prevent them from the guilt-proneness that would kill them if they don't do it. This is completely a prosocial behaviour that occurred due to the result of guilt-proneness. If the women weren't been guilt-prone for leaving the internees to die of starvation, they wouldn't have decided to sacrifice their bodies.

There were also instances in the novel where the women took this decision to escape from the guilt of not owning the food to their husbands. This is very well seen in the case of the first blind man's wife who took this decision opposing her husband. The first blind man thought that giving up his wife for feeding the lustful hoodlums was a very cheap thing to do and a deprivation of dignity. He strongly opposed his wife going along with the other women to become prey for the hoodlums. But the wife was so determined that her action of staying would make her and her husband undeserving to be fed. Her decision like the other women was not to fall for the guilt that might result from straining themselves from accepting the orders of the hoodlums. The women especially the wife of the first blind man are showing prosocial behaviour by sacrificing themselves for others.

The doctor in the novel is introduced in his surgery along with the patients who later become blind as well. The doctor being an ophthalmologist tried his best to find about the blindness disease not soon after he too became affected by the disease. The doctor reported the disease to the Ministry of Health and he was the first one to be brought to the mental asylum for quarantine along with his wife. The doctor's stay in the asylum was very useful to the other fellow internees as his decisions and ideologies about the orderly staying in the asylum was logical and as well as practical. However, the unpleasant being in the asylum like without bathing and cleaning oneself had a great impact on the doctor. He might never have lived in the state that he was like in the asylum. His attitude after a few days changed after this state of being. The situation got worse when he had physical intimation with the prostitute even after knowing the fact that his wife was not blind. He was suffering from destitution and he lost his logical senses and control, weighing to his emotions. He didn't think about the possibility of his wife watching him with the prostitute and fell for his strong emotions. Later, when he came to know that his wife had witnessed his intimation with the prostitute, he felt bad and guilty and asked for her forgiveness. Though the wife understood his state and forgave him, the guilty consciousness persisted in him for a long while. In the course of the novel, there comes a scene where the doctor speaks about the incident with his wife. He says that his mind still then was affected by the fact that he was intimate with the woman with black glasses and every time she was going out with them for searching food, his guiltiness increased. The doctor knew that he made a mistake and wanted to absolve himself from that guilt. After that conversation, he tries to restore the old bondage that he had with his wife. He tells his wife to leave the woman with dark glasses at home and it was enough that they both made the venture. This change of mind believing to do the right thing for his wife after he realised his mistake is prosocial behaviour. His attitude may or may not have brought happiness to his wife, but trying to make things alright by changing certain courses of action is prosocial behaviour.

The doctor's wife is the major protagonist of the Novel. She was the only one with eyesight while all the others around her went blind. She faked herself being blind to be with her husband. When situations went worse, She felt that it was her responsibility to guide the blind internees. If it wasn't for the doctor's wife, a few internees couldn't have made it alive in the mental asylum. But, there are instances where the doctor's wife felt helpless

despite her ability to see while the others cannot. When the women were asked by the hoodlums to feed their lust, the doctor's wife could have done something or at least tried to have done something but she was scared and accepted the decision without any protest. Later, when the woman with insomnia died from the gang rape, all the terrible things underwent by the women to feed their fellow internees with food made them helplessly numb and emotionless. The doctor's wife would have undergone a great impact than the other women as she had the ability to see and could have done something to stop all those terrible things from happening. The guiltiness that resulted from the death of the woman with insomnia though the doctor's wife wasn't responsible for it, later changed her behaviour. She decided to kill the leader of hoodlums with a pair of scissors she had. The death of the leader made the other hoodlums fear and they didn't ask for any woman further for fulfilling their lust. The doctor's wife saved all the women from their wrecked situation and also made justice for the death of the woman with insomnia. This is a prosocial behaviour that the doctor's wife exhibited that emerged from the guilt-proneness of losing a fellow internee and the abduction of innocent women.

There is a strong exhibition of prosocial behaviour by most of the characters in the novel. This behaviour was a result of the guilt-proneness that each character suffered. The exhibition of behaviour may differ – a few characters showed this behaviour by action while the others showed with their intentions. Whatever be the way the characters used to express their behaviour, it all together ends in the prosocial behaviouristic trait. It is good to have prosocial behaviour as the guilt that persists in one's mind will slowly lead them to destruction. Guilt is not an easy pain that vanishes soon whereas it endures till the end of one's life. Therefore, it is essential that one gets rid of guilt-proneness but using prosocial behaviour to do it, is a good virtue to be followed. Thus, the characters in the novel, *Blindness* exhibit prosocial behaviour as a result of their guilt-proneness.

References

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