



## SOCIAL PRESSURE AND FEAR

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**Abstract:** *Social pressure causes the fear of being non-conformed from the group. Want for inclusiveness push people to achieve for themselves and the society. Many primitive societies where the law is not codified, functions by the coercive force of social pressure. But this social pressure when pushed to extreme cocoons a person and the fear of social rejection. It becomes so fierce that one may often decide to end his life or even go on a homicide spree to avenge the misdeeds of society against him. In such, social pressure may be detrimental for the healthy living of an individual. Though science tells it is upon the genetic disposition of the individual which decides whether he will be able to withstand the social pressure or not. Support should be given to overcome the emotional hijacking of the brain in terms of medical assistance or therapy or counselling so that the individual is able to sustain the pressure of the society. Last but not the least we as part of the society must be on our guard that we do not bully an individual so that it takes a toll on his physique and psyche.*

**Key words:** *Society, Social pressure, fear.*

### Introduction

A recent uneventful happening in the month of February 2018 lets us know the atrocity of fear and social pressure. A student of Jadavpur University Engineering faculty (Kolkata) committed suicide just a day before the results were out. He wrote on his suicidal note that he is not able to withstand social pressure of losing his prestige in case he fails. A day later the results were out and he was seen to have scored 92 per cent marks. What a loss to the nation, the university and the family. Even if he had not scored marks as good as 92 per cent. Suppose if he had failed and lived, would life have stopped there? We read of many failures in life who made big at the end are they not human beings? Even if one lives the ordinary life, his life is his. It has so many colours and one has the full right to enjoy the same. However in this case because of social pressure and the fear of that most pertinently a life was drawn to take the strongest decision and commit suicide. Social pressures make people extremely aversive to the society and the impact can cause to make what psychologists say anti-social personalities. These people have strong antipathy to mingle with social groups and sometimes take drastic actions like

ending the life of self or others causing a loss for the society at large. With social pressure a person coils in a cocoon and discards his normal behaviour of mixing with the society. This recoiling takes a toll on the physique and psyche of the individual pushing him gradually into the dark corners of the world from where, at a point of time, coming back seems impossible.

### Social Pressure and Fear

Psychologists say such people may have a history of being bullied by the society in some point of time for some reason, the fear of which may have impressed upon their mind like a stain and drove them to commit abnormal behaviour. This is what social pressure can lead to. It can drive one to senseless fear and take a decision which is drastic and make an end to one's life. Sometimes cases have so happened that people go on a homicide spree of killing close relatives or some other people who may be the cause of aggravation of fear and then commit suicide. Fear can manifest in many form: mainly killing self or better leaving the house and absconding; not taking risk where there is probability of failure and so on. Fear can have covert effects also. It can slowly destabilise the nervous system and

can ruin the mental make-up of the person slowly infusing anxiety disorder. The person becomes socially withdrawn and immune to stress which causes more harm in his later life or even drive him towards some mental disease which is irrevocable. The effects of fear are many, it releases stress hormones.

The main fears that play havoc in peoples' life and are causes of many anxiety disorders are listed as follows:

- Fear of being with those people that are unknown that is fear of new environment
- Fear of being reprimanded, bullied or judged
- Fear of being noticed in awkward self-mannerism
- Fear of disruption of work or routine
- Fear of being embarrassed
- Fear of being the centre of attention

Having discussed the effects and causes of fear let us discuss what actually this fear is? Fear is a particular reaction of the brain to a given stimuli which mainly comes from the environment. It is a kind of aversion to pain, loss or the prospect of losing something or someone, a reaction to the foresight of danger or disaster. A hormone called serotonin is released from the brain and it hijacks the normal senses making acute the fear or the stress. People prone to fear are extra sensory to the serotonin. But the main cause of fear is always the environment and according to psychologists and sociologists, society plays an important role in inducing the fear of an individual. The feelings that others may be watching or judging are the main cause of social fear. Mainly people with introverted nature are more prone to fear and tend to corner themselves in social aloofness which later on drives him or her into the fear or social anxiety zone.

Covert fear leads to difficulties in being assertive, negative self-talk, negative or low value of self, over reaction to criticism and low life and social skills. Fear makes the physical constitution weaker also and there may be some physical symptoms associated with the psychological fear syndrome. These are nausea, muscular tension, trembling of

nerves and voice, stomach upset, palpitation, diarrhoea, confusion, clammy hands etcetra. So from this we know that fear is a silent killer and it slowly weakens the constitution of mind, body and spirit unless and until not dealt with in eliminating the root causes at an early stage.

On the other hand this Social Pressure also takes a toll on person's health. Since the primitive days human society is hold by the gregarious instinct of men. Men tend to live in groups and make for themselves viable some set or patterns of behaviour which they think holds better the society. From there come the necessity of confirmation to the group. Till now in primitive societies where the custom of coded law has not reached, like the Jarwas of the Andaman, there is no law abiding court or policing system. The group decides what is in conformity with their culture and society and accepts the social behaviour or discards it. This is true in many remote areas of the world still today like the extreme hilly or the Polar Regions. In its way of conforming or discarding a behaviour it holds by itself the capacity to honour or dishonour rather reprimand an action as is thought good or bad according to its social status quo.

In most of the time such behaviour are valuable because they hold the backbone of social structure and makes a person conform to the social norms. But in stray cases, the atrocities of social behaviour rise above to jeopardise the security and sanctity of the individual. Then the individual existence becomes at stake and this becomes a cause of fear for the individual. So the same society that was holding the basic existence of a human being becomes the cause of concern, fear and stress for the individual. Somewhere in the back of the mind the atrocious and harmful picture of the society lays its pre-dominance, the shadow of which casts a fear psychosis in the mind of the suffering individual who fleets like a deer from the maligning society. Sociophobia often extends to such a level as a person may get intimidated just to see a big crowd and may fear of being cornered in the plethora of the human

numbers present there. Actually the fear is the anxiety of criticism, being judged and bullied.

### **Social Pressure and Socio-phobia**

Psychologists are of the opinion that the disorder due to anxiety of society is socio-phobia. The disorder is the tendency to avoid society for the fear of being rejected or discarded. This is equally prevalent among both the genders. It may happen due to some bad experience or a series of bad experiences of social disapproval during the childhood or adolescence. It may also happen when one feels the pressure of high social expectations. Modern psychology says, rather than being exposed to social maltreatment, it is the social overprotective mechanism which can stem the psychological rapture in the mind of an adolescent or a child and grow into socio-phobia at large. But different set of people act to social pressures differently. Though it is a sad incident if we see in the probability ratio it is only a handful of people who cannot withstand the social pressure and take drastic decision with their life. Though even the handful of number matters but what we stress here that everyone does not have so high strung personality. Scientists say that it is rather genetic disposition which causes people to be nervous, fearful and fear the society at large. At extreme cases these types of personalities have a tendency to get stressed have anxiety disorder and the victim of acute depression. So extreme fear is certainly a form of mental illness and is not prevalent in all human beings. Examples are also there of individual who break the barrier of social norms and make a decision in their life to do something daunting, like revolting to save the nation or the country from some convention which is harmful. So histories of social revolts are also there which proves that all people are not fearful of the society. Neither is everybody confirmatory to the social norms. So judging by the overall scenario we may say that society holds the basis of holding the human groups together with bondage of conformity which is yielding for the society and the individual. But sometimes that conformity turns into the form of

disapproval in case expectations fall short or becomes punitive in case there is some misdoing.

The individual who faces it either coils or conforms to the social fear and tries to act according to the social standard. Some who cannot act according to the social expectation succumb to the social prejudice while there are others who revolt against the social suppression, go for an upheaval and rectify the malicious social norm at large which is harmful for the society judging it with the rational faculty. Such examples are Martin Luther King, Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. So it depends entirely on the individual whether to accept the social norms, conform to the social pressure, succumb to it or rise in revolt to uplift the society for the betterment. The capacity of coping with the social pressure is dependable on upbringing, positive environment, life experiences and none the less the play and impact of genes in one's behaviour pattern.(Sociophobia)

### **Possibility of discarding social pressure**

It is actually the fear of or respect for society which makes us to contribute in a larger way for the betterment of the society and us. For example when we strive to establish ourselves through studies and earning good or doing some good social work which will work at large for the benefit of the society we try to conform to some social norms and comply with the social expectations. We want to see ourselves good as regards to the social standard and perform the tasks that are laudable. Social appreciation has its value as well because it inspires us and motivates us to perform something to our height. Even when a person says he or she is self-motivated, at the back of the mind the person has some thought or expectation about the social applause, the appreciation and the social clamour. So society at large plays a vital role in ascertaining the conformity of behaviour of an individual and most often it is on the positive side. But this social approval brings in the fear of social disapproval also. As for example the boy who got 92 per cent must have been a studious one and have experienced many instances of social approval and applauses before. He must

have been the cause of wonder and praise of his family and friends. However most often we are unaware when this high expectation from society puts someone in the extreme corner and puts the person in the fear realm of disapproval and rejection.

The person who was gaining social molly cuddling loses being senses and fears being disapproved because of his inability to achieve success or to achieve a certain mission. This fear of rejection corners a person and drives him to isolation, anxiety disorder and even stress. Social fear may manifest in minor forms also which are not very acute in form yet are detrimental for the growth of an individual. For example a person during interview may feel extremely shy or fearful of the consequences and suffer from tongue tiedness. Even answers to the known questions appear to be dicey or complex and the person feels a situation of extreme stress and nervousness which jeopardises his performance and the chance of winning the situation. People fearful of social acceptance most often become unsuccessful in the attempts of achievements out of fear. Thus the fear of rejection and being bullied plays havoc in one's life. (Myers)

#### **How far is fear atrocious**

Most of the time, the fear to which people succumb cast a shadow larger than life and the rational thinking abilities are hijacked. Science says that the frontal lobe of our brain has a part, a pear shaped one called the amygdala which is actually a lump of nerve cells and looks like a pear or almond. We have the seats of emotions present in it and when our fear takes an upper hand the rational senses fly off and we see the disaster in front of us in a picture larger than life. No situation in life is beyond the barriers to overcome. But a fear-cast mind sees the situation in a larger than life perspective. It thinks head and tail of all kinds or weird consequences that will perhaps never come true and takes the decisions which are cruel with life and becomes a victim. Question is why someone should give so much importance to society rather than prioritising the self. Education should be given to lay importance to self first and then the society

because it is the security and comforts the society brings to ourselves that society has become or should be important to us. It should not be the other way round. One should have the gut feelings to go against conformity if that is what truth calls for or if that is what is good for the self and society at large. There will be some people senseless to laugh at other's failures', make fun of others pains but there are people who come as saviour also. We have to be the judges ourselves. We need to be conditioned to take the goodness of the society and discard the ill effects of social pressure. I give here an example there may be a person who laughs or mocks at the failure of a certain boy during the exam but that same person responds quickly when the boy's father meets with an accident. This typical man represents the society at large. So we need to condition ourselves to be deaf to his bullying words and yet take his service when there is a case of emergency. This kind of conditioning can help us exist in the society and yet take the peer help in time of need, though always such stark distinction is not possible. People are not matured to conditioning to extract the good out of society and discard the gal in the gutter as needed to maintain a fruitful life. The other option is to become very self - reliant in a modern society as not to give any weightage to social pressure in being able to hurt one's self esteem.

#### **Coping with social pressure**

As discussed above, conditioning and education help considerably in overcoming the ill effects of the society and rise in defence. It may even make one be able to accept the pressure and be susceptible to the social norms. The signs of anxiety and fear are detectable from a very tender age. It usurps early, remains as a neglected syndrome, untreated in most cases and slowly outbursts into the form of disorder or a drastic decision which takes a toll on the life. It needs to be detected early by parents, family and teachers whether a child is extremely nervous or particularly shy in his or her behaviour towards his peers. Sometimes a particular situation or environment may be the cause of the extreme shyness or too much botheration, in such

circumstances the child must be removed from such an environment and brought to a place where he or she can foster in a relaxed and healthy manner. But all of these may not be possible for all households and there may be cases of aberration where the socio-phobia has developed. If such be the instance, the person should be taken to a psychiatrist and treated with proper medicines which control the flow of serotonin in the brain so that stress hormones are under control.

Modern medicines have done tremendous development in treating stress disorders or anxieties. Early treatment saves from the harmful impact on life, family, health, job and career. There are various therapies like the cognitive therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy, response prevention, vivo therapy, group therapy, psychotherapy.

(Sociophobia)

### **Does society need to change**

Here comes the crucial question. Society is actually a gamut of the individual but it starts with me, myself. So when I am laughing at my neighbours mishaps and failures and enjoying them I must remember that I am being cruel, judgemental and harmful for an individual or society at large. If not to anyone I am answerable to God and there the justice

is not blind. Even if I am not a theist, I should own the responsibility of digging a ditch for myself because I am flaming a harmful behaviour and this may in some future day impact me. When we laugh at the failure of our neighbour's boy we should rather think what would have happened if the same boy was my own brother. Thus we should snap from ourselves the harmful impact of peer pressure encompassing in the society.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up social pressure can indeed be very harmful in ruining the life, health and family of an individual. It can be the cause of anxiety disorder and stress, may ruin the happiness of a family, rob some person of his life and deprive someone from getting the right appreciation he gets from the society. But at large it is the individual's power to cope or resist such pressure or cope which plays a vital role. Hence stress should be given to strengthen the mental make-up of the individual. If any anomalies should happen, the family and friend should immediately address the incident to a psychiatrist or a psychologist before situations can aggravate. Last but not the least society needs to be more caring and sensitive to such incidents.

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