Chapter II
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The experience of evil is the most obvious common lot of animate existence in general and human existence in particular. It is an inescapable universal condition of all living entities. While for the animate existence evil remains merely in the form of its experience, it is in man alone that evil does not remain only a matter of experience. On account of the reflective nature of man, evil is raised to the status of a problem of evil. In the case of man, religion and the problem of evil, both originate together in the rational nature.

This is how the religions of the world give this problem a place of central importance. The issue for them is, how to account for the seeming contradictions and incoherences of good and evil in our experience, and that too in face of the existence of God or the supreme spiritual order? How is one to reconcile between the metaphysical and moral attributes of God on the one hand and the existence of evil on the other?

Definition of evil

Man experiences miseries and sufferings in all their concrete forms and these are inseparably connected with the problem of evil. It is difficult to define clearly and
comprehensively the concept of evil or account for its existence by any rational method. But it is understood that as good and happiness is the felt experience which is agreeable to body, mind and heart; evil is diametrically opposite of this and people seek to avoid it. It is an absence of happiness. It is antithesis of good, that is, it is painful and undesirable, dysteleological and disapproved.

Generally, the dualistic sensitivities of good and evil originate from the constant and repetitious feelings of pleasure and pain, happiness and unhappiness. Thoughts and feelings regarding attachment and non-attachment, taste and distaste, likes and dislikes grow out of this stable categorisation. As we shall see further, the events and circumstances in themselves are not self-explanatory. They are neither good nor evil, but it is the mental valuation which accounts for the same.

In place of abstract theoretical considerations of the problem of evil versus omnipotent God, we seek a practical religious approach to the concrete experience of evil in the world. In fact all religions, as we referred to earlier, stress the need of liberation from this evil existence which is both metaphysical and psychological. Hence when we look into the constituting substance of evil, the religions trace it to the origin of creation itself, whereas our idea of evil
originated with the birth of moral consciousness in man.

(i) It has an extensive influence

Evil has an extensive influence and it has an immense power. "There is", as Schopenhauer said "not much to be got anywhere in the world ..... it is evil which generally has the upper hand." On one hand man suffers from his natural inherent weaknesses and limitations, on the other hand there is a deceptive initial attraction towards evil too. Inspite of all our struggles and various ways of ending evil and suffering in various aspects of life, the total freedom from it is our haunting quest. This search for the supreme good and happiness is always alive issue for man.

In fact, there are innumerable conditioning factors for man and which keep on growing unexpectedly and unpredictably in the evolving nature of reality. Accordingly, man confronts various aspects of evil both individually and socially.

Man, on his part, employs many temporary palliatives with long-term and short-term effects to seek release from evil and suffering. But this is no way of removing evil completely. Everyone has to face it in one's relative realm with contextual consequences.

In the conditioned world of cause and effect, evil with all its varieties cannot be denied. One cannot escape it and
has to bear it. Life as such, both with man and animal is suffering. No doubt, the types of variability and intensity of evil are multiple. But the distinguishing point is that whereas animals have physical, and at best mental sufferings only man has other dimensions of moral and spiritual sufferings as well.

(ii) It is an essential condition of life

We noted earlier that the mere theological consideration of the problem of evil in relation to God's goodness and omnipotence is beyond our purview here. For this is too intractable an issue to have a clear conception of it. Again, this attempt at understanding evil with reference to God's goodness diverts the attention from the actual existence of evil and suffering to God, and what is more, that it makes our analysis mainly of moral evil as superficial.

Thus, with reference to this theological issue, taking analogical explanation of evil as darkness (i.e. it is merely the absence of light) or in amateurish belief of personification (i.e. satan in flesh) are no proper answers. The concept of devil is a primitive one and it means nothing more than an anthropomorphic suggestion. This way we cannot have either a clear understanding of the problem of evil, or its solution
as given in the different religions.

Evil and suffering is not a problem that affects man's life intermittently. It is not a chance occurring but constitutes essentially the very condition of his life. This evil appears to be perpetuated in all our strifes and struggles, and the same evil is "perpetuated in the struggle against other and different evils such as injustice and disloyalty." That is, evil has myriad forms. So our basic query is with the general problem of evil relating to human life. In contrast to the specific causal descriptive inquiry of the scientific nature, religions probe evil from an evaluative inquiry of the intuitive insight. When the supreme reality is all inclusive, even all the descriptive search become the part and parcel of the general evaluative inquiry of reality.

(iii) Some varieties of evil enumerated

To recapitulate evil in general, as it is in our experience, means in any sense something that is repugnant and intolerable, and hence worthy of being directly or indirectly resisted or avoided. It represents all that we find as error and disorder, pain and misery etc. etc. In opposition to good which we call happiness or absence of suffering, we would see herein that evil is suffering from, and for want of, many things.
Again, as there are different views regarding the concept of good and happiness, which are uniquely sought in one's own way; so it is with evil and suffering too. There are different kinds of evil and suffering and accordingly the good or the way out is desired. Some of these could be enumerated as following:

**Physiological or bodily evil:** It constitutes of all pains, privations and discomfort which are the bodily ailments. Often one suffers from nervous and sensuous breakdown too.

**Emotional evil:** Our desires, thoughts and mental modifications play much part towards attaining happiness. But disorderly desires always lead to the discrepancy between our illusions and reality. Disappointment here, manifests in greed and anger, envy and malice.

**Imaginary evil:** Fantasies and imaginations of mind make for many flights of the past or future evils. Truly man suffers very much from his mental projections.

**Volitional evil:** In his tendency to follow animal passions, man very often ignores ethical ideas. Temptations of flesh predominate over the aspirations of the spirit.

**Intellectual evil:** Ignorance is also difficult to remove. Improper thinking leads to varieties of evil.
All these various kinds of evil do not have absolute
distinction, for they are interrelated in various ways. These
are only few instances of evil occurring to man from known and
sometimes from unknown realms. If their causes are known
rightly, man can relieve himself from the evil influence in a
fair measure too.

But inspite of all the efforts for centuries, man cannot
do away completely from the abysmal depth of evil influence.
Commonly man knows only the empirical aspects of evil and
hence employs, though in vain, only empirical means in search
of an absolute way out. Though granted some positive gains,
the record of human history proves contrary to man's search
of absolute good and happiness. For, merely to take into
account the survival value of man's psycho-physical and socio-
economic existence, is giving too low a view of the human
nature. At stake is man's destiny and his masterhood.

Thus, even at this evident juncture of human evolution,
man's feeling of emptiness and meaningfulness is great.
There is a loss of freedom and spontaneity. Mentally there
is much confusion and imbalance, for "stresses arise out of
the uneven rates of change" today. Man has yet to assert
his higher nature.

(iv) Evil in the context of man's higher nature

Besides its empirical aspect, evil is experienced as the
feeling of misery and suffering from man's transcendental
aspect too. This indicates in another way that the essential criterion of 'good' and 'happiness' is not only the empirical one of dualistic nature, but it has a transcendental reference also. The empirical existence of contraries is mainly due to the feelings of likes and dislikes, depending on the cordiality or incordiality of senses. It is the external factors that chiefly count in this pragmatic and practical consideration.

A subtler and conscious spiritual and philosophical attempt is a must for the wholesome happiness and fulfilment of man.

Let us be clear still more and deal further with natural evil and moral evil respectively.

Natural evil

Tennyson rightly called the natural calamities as 'red in tooth and claw'. Horrible earthquakes, devastating floods, famines and pestilences are fraught with terrible destruction and misery to all living beings. Inspite of all precautions, the wrath of nature in one form or another is an inevitable havoc which is beyond the control of man. Mill truly opines that "nature functions as if with the most supercilious disregard both of mercy and of justice." For man, in a way being the part of the vast and infinite panorama of nature,
is subject to all the processes of nature.

In fact nature is man's cradle as well as the grave. In this respect man cannot be its monarch. Ordinarily the working of the natural forces are essentially neutral, which cannot be assumed to be in service of man. Again, the idea of evil in this physical realm mainly arises due to man's maladjustment with nature and his irrational ambitions.

Admitted that from the larger viewpoint natural laws are not neutral and are mainly directed towards the preservation of the universe as a whole including man. But in so far the problem of natural evil in relation to man is concerned, it is of unique nature. It is an individual matter with subjective and psychological fact. For naturalism by itself, cannot even explain natural things. That is, natural evil is not self-explanatory, and it is beyond the reach of scientific instruments. It only leads to the conclusion that ultimately physical evils cannot be resolved in physical terms only. For a better grasping of the problem of evil man must embark on a new avenue of understanding.

Moral evil

If we can understand that the physical evil is the outcome of moral evil, we are led to seek a moral judgement which by its very nature claims to be objective. Moral evil is a tragic sense of suffering due to difference between what
is and what ought to be. Moral guilt and moral approval is another dimension in man which has an incurable dissatisfaction and righteous wrath of misdeeds and unmeritorious actions. Moral evil is an opposition to the moral order of the universe.

The individual fails in the process of realizing the moral ideal. It is either the human weakness and the lack of courage to pursue a goal or the defective notion of one's good which leads to moral evil. Anyway, the source of moral evil is complex, but mainly it deals with the attitude of the individual towards the world outside and himself within.

One is apt to consider as evil all that comes in the way of one's attainment of the moral ideal. It may be either due to:

(a) The tainted social influences: Knowingly or unknowingly, along with the good forces, evil forces of the society too play on the incipient impulses of man. Here the man becomes at once the object and the subject of society. That evil is also defined "by the social structure and one's location in it, by an individual's experience, and by his tendencies to interpret the experience in given ways." The prevailing injustice and imbalance of the various social aspects and institutions leave much negative influence on man.
(b) Or due to oneself: Man's mind is the field where the struggle of good and evil has been there all throughout the history of man. Narrow self-interests and cravings, desires and solicitations of lower nature wage war with higher and spiritual nature of man.

The divided self of man is at the root of the whole problem. When the man is a self-conscious product of evolution, he is no longer a nature-directed entity. Man is a combination of two forces of the lower and the higher self, the former pulling him down to commit sin and vice and the latter pulling him up to do good and be virtuous. It is left to man to make for a choice between these two. Very often it is the flesh that proves stronger than the spirit.

Moral evil is thus explained in the context of the human freedom. To this effect we shall see that all religions accord a due importance and significance to the human freedom. And so, to arrive at the clear understanding of the issue of evil, we leave aside the non-moral and non-voluntary natural evil as the seat of the problem. If the man is free to act, he must be free to originate evil acts too.

But the very fact of the possibility of free choice both ways, a freedom to do good or evil, evidences that this freedom is liable to be corrupted. It is not that man
always opts and strives for good and happiness. When a man falls short of his ideal behaviour, it is moral evil. In other words as Prof. Grave puts, "moral evils are not necessary, but necessarily possible consequences of freedom." Moral evil is essentially a product of human conditioning, still it is originated through the exercise of his free will only.

Now the corollary from moral evil, that is by its virtue of being evil, it must be necessarily related to sufferings in some way or other. In case of violations of social laws, one faces the respective social consequences of the place and time. But from the religious point of view, moral evil is the transgression of the law of the supreme reality. In this latter case of the transgression of God's law, man looks from the same narrow self-good which has prompted man in the former moral system itself. And what is more when due to the influence of moral evil, one is led by the motive that it is better to break the law than to follow it.

Thus, from the religious perspective moral evil is the complete subjugation of the human spirit which is regarded as the crown of God's creation. It is this metaphysical lapse which is the crux of the unique tragedy of man. For all religions striving to realize the supreme good or happiness is incumbent on all men. It is the will of God that justifies
our quest of good. To disregard this is the basic alienation from reality.

(i) Man's violations

Thus, unlike the nature, man is very much inclined to the breaking of the various laws. To some extent he can overlook the physical and bodily laws too. But we see that man frequently violates the moral laws, the social laws and the spiritual laws. Constant battling against these evils makes man incapable of enjoying the blessings of life. The lack of moral determination is accompanied by the deficiency in the power of moral appreciation too.

(ii) Evil lurks in the heart of man

History of man shows that evil is located in man himself. Prof. C.E.M. Joad also maintains that "evil is so widespread, so deep seated ... and that evil is endemic in the heart of man." It is in the nature of the selfish ego which is too much pampered and it works as a powerful factor in corrupting the individual. Evil dominates in a variety of ways in the individual as well as society.

This evil in the heart of man is a chronic malady, still within it lies its remedy too. But when it can be a cause of progress, it leads to degeneration too. The fact is that the man possesses both the divine and the diabolical spirits. Thus the covetous, selfish and short-sighted ego causes a
sense of separativeness and self assertiveness. Such isola-
tion causes "faltering, weakness and an impression of 
confusion and meaninglessness, an underrating of our 
possibilities."

Man must realize that the remedy lies in himself only.
So long as the attitude of exclusiveness persists, the problem
of evil cannot be solved. The narrow outlook is ego centric
one, which makes man view wrongly as if he is himself the
centre of the universe. It precludes man to rise to his
higher plane.

Thus the problem of evil from the religious perspective
rules out any hedonistic inclination. The so called defin-
ition of good and happiness from hedonistic outlook is a
relative and a partial judgement. The world order being a
part and parcel of the supreme reality as such, it is a false
dignity on the part of man to look for a change in it according
to his subjective wants. The defining of good and evil in
terms of some sensuous and immediate requirements is
untenable religiously. This concept of evil is the judgement
in the context of some metaphysical or ideal state of being,
painfully felt as unrealized in the actual. It is a dis-
quieting spiritual experience.
Evil from a higher metaphysical aspect

We can see by now that the concept of evil from religious viewpoint indicates more than what is suggested of natural and moral evils. The concept of evil is looked at uniquely by religion. It is not merely an opposite of good which would restrict to something bad or immoral, etc. The problem of evil by its very nature being a fundamental issue of man's life, it calls for an inquiry of a fundamental nature.

Man has not yet become conscious of the fact that he is a part and parcel of the spiritual reality. He refuses to listen to the call of the eternal within him. It is a tragedy that the man is in quest of the eternal good and happiness but he lives as though the momentary pursuits and relative goods are all that is enough for his goal. But mere relative goods do not lead him to eternal happiness. If man's nature were limited to the conditional world process, he would have come to harmony and resolution with himself long back.

Sooner or later man has to realize the contingent character of the world and existence. All his attempts at discovering his goal seem to be exhausted. He becomes conscious of his temporality and finitude. He seeks for a way out when he is awakened to the truth of evil and suffering at a reflective level.
Man feels an innate depravity and dissatisfaction. It is a conflict of disruption and disorder, bondage and suffering. This privative experience is inexplicable by ordinary causality. And again, the logical analysis of this is not possible, for it would lead to the fallacy of infinite regress. Only, man is intensely conscious of the gulf between his existing state and ultimate divinity.

From higher aspect this experience of evil is a profound human drama with a great significance. It is a state of spiritual wretchedness. Man has denied the quest of his higher meaning and purpose of life. There is an incompatibility between his constant inner teleology and the acquired variable teleology. It is setting one's own private will against the universal will of the supreme reality. Man must responsibly dig at the root of the problem.

Thus, the concept of evil from the religious viewpoint means indifference towards the spiritual summum bonum or the metaphysical truth of man. Man keeps away from this basic reflection while dealing in the world of experience. Accordingly he develops a wrong notion of himself. The mere practical mindedness does not lead man to the core of his existence. In fact empirical evils are more of the nature of misery and pain than as truly a sense of evil and depravity as it is in metaphysical perspective of religion.
How is it that man's life is rooted in ignorance and sorrow, guilt and hostility and a sense of aloneness? Till the man strikes at the root, good and happiness cannot be realized. So long as this true understanding of the truth of unity has not dawned, there is a continuous discontent. The loss of rapport with a greater cosmic reality makes one glimpse imperfection all around.

The possession of free will by man is of great value. It is man's privilege as well as a great responsibility. Then how are we confounded in our quest of good? Much of it could be reduced to the lacunae in the knower himself. But when religions assert that the ignorance is avoidable, which means in other words that bliss and freedom is possible. But this does not mean that we can create and seek good according to our own sweet will. The supreme good possesses an absolute existence which we can constantly pursue and understand in our quest of it.

Man does follow good, as far as he fulfils his destiny. Denial to listen and follow the supreme reality is the root of all evils. It leads to the weakening of the moral fibre of man.

No doubt it is a typically private, ineffable and incommunicable experience. It is this more intense experience which is the basis of reflection.
The concept of evil as evolved in the history of religion

As early as the time of evolutionary process of the development of brain in man, the idea, knowledge and experience of evil and suffering have been constantly connected with man.

Fearfulness is one of the most elementary instincts existing in man. The root of this human nature is evident in the fear of evil powers as the first and most obvious aspect of religion in the primitive culture. Then man was at a very low level of experience. He used to regard all diseases and physical ills as due to these evil powers. Thus, while there was no proof, and one could not say definitely, as to who or what a demon was. It is a situation of demonical possession. For the primitive man considered good and evil as benevolent and malevolent spirits in the world.

It was a simple polytheism. Its value was that it enabled individuals to come to terms with an otherwise abstract inscrutable and impenetrable universe. The demonical understanding provided psychological satisfaction to man. This fear was the outcome of ignorance about the laws of nature. But it gave an inkling that the personification of evil in the forms of Gods and Goddesses was due to the fact that evil and suffering arose out of a fundamental conflict and tension prevailing in the universe.
But in the course of time as man gained much knowledge and understanding, the number of deities decreased and there was the growing tendency towards monotheism. History of the human race is a continuous struggle against ignorance either unconsciously or consciously with the ultimate goal of attaining clear and comprehensive knowledge of the ultimate reality. Man seemed to move towards the realization of an ever greater sphere of good. The newly won power of understanding gave him greater opportunities for gratification. But the increase in knowledge did not mean that man was wiser for positive use and direction.

With the still higher development of the religious consciousness in the proper monotheistic direction, it was not easy to justify the ways of God to man if evil and suffering were to be thought of as originating in mere malevolent spirit. The weight of moral superiority gained ground so as to be capable of enforcing one's will upon the evil force. Accordingly, the fear of evil powers in lower stages tended to be increasingly viewed with moral outlook and religion became more spiritual.

In the long history of religion, man sought remedies in magic and superstitions, sacrifices and rituals, miracles and penances. From dread and awe of evil powers, moral outlook on the problem of evil was a leap by itself. It
was here that man looked beyond anything that could be 'given' in the facts of experience. Man did feel tired of his long and tedious outside search. Then he realized that ultimately he must turn inwards and dip within himself.

After much development in knowledge today and particularly of the causes of evil and suffering, there has been quite a fair reduction in the quantity of pain in the world. Still, there remains a surplus of unaccountable evil, pain and suffering. It is this problem which forms the heart of mystery.
NOTES


4. 'Is there more evil than good in nature' in Approaches to the philosophy of religion - edited by Bronstein and Schulweis, New York, p. 227.


8. The world crisis and faiths - B.K. Palmstieerna, Unwin Bros. Ltd., London, 1942, p. 120.