CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Burnout

Burnout is not a term that has sprung magically into prominence. When the articles started appearing in lesser known publications of America in the mid 1970s, people enthusiastically responded. However, the term 'burnout' was received by critics interestingly, for the reason that, 'burnout' is simply an old wine in a new bottle – a trendy name for a problem that has been around for a long time. They argued, 'what is known to be 'burnout' today was called 'depression' yesterday; it stands for alienation, apathy, boredom, blue-collar blues, mid life crisis, or job stress, hence 'burnout' is nothing more than a catchy term.

The current fascination with 'burnout' is fairly recent and with astonishing rapidity has become almost a 'catch-word' to convey an almost unlimited variety of personal and social problems of American workers. There is some doubt as regards the true extent of the 'burnout' syndrome because the word has become ubiquitous and used in an extraordinarily wide variety of contexts. It is used as an accusation against uncaring workers by underserving, frustrated clients. It is also used as an excuse by some professionals for half-hearted efforts, as an indication to others of the need for professional renewal, and as a motivation for still others to leave their fields altogether. Burnout is said to afflict only human service professionals, but has
also been used to describe students, blue collar workers, sportsman, and indeed, practically every one.

However, the increasing concern with ‘burnout’ in the human services these days is evidenced in books, journals, popular magazines and on television. More than a 'hot topic', 'burnout' is a serious issue that affects the welfare of not only millions of human service workers but of their tens of millions of clients as well.

2.1.1 Emergence of the Concept

Freudenberger (1974) the field's one of the best-known methodologist, is given the credit first, for using the term 'burnout' in its present sense - to denote a state of physical, emotional and attitudinal depletion resulting from conditions of work. He used it to characterise the psychological state of certain volunteers who worked with him at alternative health care agencies like free clinics for drug addicts. Within a few months of work, these young, idealistic men and women would begin to appear as more tired, depressed, apathetic and needy than the clients for whom they were working. These symptoms were accompanied by guilt, paranoia and a sense of omnipotence which made it difficult for them to cut back on their level of activity or involvement.

As a psychologist, Freudenberger has emphasised the psychology of the individual as a primary base for 'burnout'. His work relied on a case-study approach and focused on the psychological abilities and vulnerabilities of individuals placed in stressful work situations. Freudenberger, studied the
individual dynamics of 'burnout' – the psychological reasons why it occurs and the process by which it occurs.

Maslach and Pines, on the other hand, are both social psychologists by training. Their approach has been to study 'burnout' from a more social – psychological, research oriented perspective with a greater focus on the relationship between environmental and individual factors. Working individually, as well as collectively, using both questionnaires and interviews, they have collected data on several thousand workers across many types of human service jobs, thus providing an empirical basis for the study of 'burnout'.

These two perspectives – the clinical approach of Freudenberger and the empirical approach of Maslach and Pines have complemented each other well. Findings based on each perspective have been mutually corroborative and together, they have generated a wealth of data and insights into the phenomenon of 'burnout'.

2.1.2 The Problem of Definition

To understand 'burnout' Maslach (1984) opines that we need to know first what it is. Herein lies the major source of confusion and controversy about the concept. There is no single definition of 'burnout' that is accepted as standard. There is no clear consensus among consultants, clinicians, or researchers, nor is there much agreement among staff, managers, or administrators. Reports in the mass media have contributed their own
definitions of the phenomenon. Most individuals have their own personal
definitions of ‘burnout’ as well.

Definitions of ‘burnout’ include the following:

- A syndrome of emotional exhaustion depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do ‘people work’ of some kind.

- A progressive loss of idealism, energy and purpose experienced by people in the helping professions as a result of conditions of their work.

- A state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion marked by physical depletion and chronic fatigue, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, and the development of a negative self-concept and negative attitudes toward work, life, and other people.

- A syndrome of inappropriate attitudes towards clients and self, often associated with uncomfortable physical and emotional symptoms.

- A state of exhaustion, irritability, and fatigue that markedly decreases the workers’ effectiveness and capability.

- To deplete oneself. To exhaust one’s physical and mental resources. To wear oneself out by excessively striving to reach some unrealistic expectations imposed by oneself or by the values of the society.

- To wear oneself out by doing what one has to do. An inability to cope adequately with the stressors of work or personal life.
• A malaise of the spirit. A loss of will. An inability to mobilize interests and capabilities.

• To become debilitated, weakened, because of extreme demands on one's physical and/or mental energy.

• An accumulation of intense negative feelings that is so debilitating that a person withdraws from the situation in which these feelings are generated.

• A pervasive mood of anxiety giving way to depression and despair.

• A process in which a professional’s attitudes and behaviour change in negative ways in response to job strain.

• An inadequate coping mechanism used consistently by an individual to reduce stress.

• A condition produced by working too hard for too long in a high pressure environment.

• A debilitating psychological condition resulting from work-related frustrations, which results in lower employee productivity and morale.

Not only do these definitions vary from each other to greater or lesser degrees but different terms are sometimes used for similar concepts. Some definitions are limited, while others are more wide ranging. Some are precise, while others are global. Some refer to a purely psychological condition, while others include actual behaviours. Some describe a state or syndrome, while others talk about a process. Some make reference to causes, others to effects.
Despite the differences, there are also similarities among definitions of 'burnout'. An analysis of these common threads may reveal a working definition of 'burnout' that is shared by most people.

First of all, there is a general agreement that burnout occurs at an individual level. Second, there is general agreement that 'burnout' is an internal psychological experience involving feelings, attitudes, motives and expectations. Third, there is general agreement that 'burnout' is a negative experience for the individual, in that it concerns problems, distress, discomfort, dysfunction and/or negative consequences.

Nevertheless, there are some key dimensions of 'burnout' for which there is majority agreement. The emphases placed on particular dimensions are the terminology to describe them may differ from one definition to the next, but a definite pattern is discernible.

The dimension on which there is the most agreement is exhaustion. It is also described as wearingout, loss of energy, depletion, debilitation and fatigue. Although sometimes this exhaustion is a physical one, more often a psychological or emotional exhaustion is described as central to 'burnout'.

A second dimension of these definitions is a negative shift in response to others: Depersonalization, negative or inappropriate attitudes towards clients, loss of idealism, and irritability.

A third dimension found in these definitions is a negative response toward oneself and one’s Personal Accomplishments, also described as
depression, low morale, withdrawal, reduced productivity or capability and an
inability to cope.

2.1.3 Assumptions of Burnout

Carroll and White (1981) have enlisted the assumptions about 'burnout'
on the basis of the writings of various experts on this field as well as the
personal and co-workers experience with 'burnout'.

1. Since 'burnout' is caused by prolonged exposure to stress
and frustration, all of the various personal and
environmental factors that generate stress and frustration
for human must considered as potential cause of 'burnout'.

2. 'Burnout' is a holistic or psycho-biosocial concept. To
construe it solely or even principally as a psycho-
physiological stress management issue is to oversimplify it.
How an individual fulfills or fails to fulfill his or her needs,
especially those needs that are dependent on
interpersonal relationships for their fulfillment, deserves
coequal status with the concept of stress management.

3. Since environmental settings other than the work
environment can generate stress and frustrate important
needs. They must be considered as potential contributors
to the experience of 'burnout' on the job. Efforts to
ameliorate and/or prevent 'burnout', therefore, must take
these ecosystems into account.

4. The quality of interpersonal relationships that distinguish
the work environment and other ecosystems of the worker
is especially important to consider.
5. Signs of 'burnout' will occur in the individual and his or her ecosystems. Which of these signs will be most easily recognised will depend as much on the sign's origin, severity, and duration as it does on the observer's theoretical orientation to 'burnout', his or her experience and sensitivity to 'burnout', and the honesty of the observer.

6. To the outside observer, the behavioural manifestations and negative consequences associated with 'burnout' may sometimes appear to emerge suddenly, dramatically, with little or no warning. More typically, however, the signs of burnout occur slowly, overtime, with ever-increasing severity.

7. 'Burnout' is a process, not an event. Whether or not it occurs in distinct stages is a matter under study.

8. 'Burnout' may occur in varying degrees for the individual, it varies from relatively mild distractions and energy loss through serious and debilitating illnesses that may result in death.

9. Since the duration of 'burnout' may vary considerably, the signs of 'burnout' will also vary in duration. Moreover, the signs of 'burnout' may vary with respect to their consistency and intensity.

10. 'Burnout' may be experienced more than once by the same individual. How and to what degree the first experience of 'burnout' affects subsequent experiences of 'burnout' is a matter to be determined by research.

11. A worker's awareness of his or her 'burnout' status and concomitant decrement in the quantity and quality of work
performed may vary from complete denial to nearly full consciousness of the experience.

12. 'Burnout' can be infectious, in the sense that one person's burnout constitutes an additional source of stress and frustration for his or her co-workers and others with whom he or she interacts in other ecosystems.

13. 'Burnout' is especially common and severe among professionals who deliver direct care and assistance to emotionally distressed, indigent clients in public institutions or agencies.

14. When the aggregate level of stress and frustration among workers within the work environment prevents the completion of tasks essential to the primary mission/purpose of the organization, the organization itself may be described as burned out.

15. Although certain characteristics are shared by all burned-out workers and organizations, there will always be aspects of the 'burnout' process that are unique to particular persons, work sites, and organizations. Restorative interventions and prevention efforts, therefore, will always have to be individualized.

16. There is no known personality trait or personality configuration that, in and of itself, will cause someone to 'burnout'. It is possible, however, that certain personality characteristics may predispose and/or make some one more vulnerable to 'burnout' in certain ecosystems. Research is desperately needed in this area.

17. 'Burnout' is not a disease; the medical model, in other words, is not an appropriate analytical model for
understanding and coping with 'burnout', even though physical disorders may arise as a consequence of 'burnout'.

18. 'Burnout' should not be confused with malingering; we believe 'burnout' is more likely to be experienced among highly motivated than among less motivated workers.

19. 'Burnout' may lead to subsequent personal and professional growth and development, as well as greater despair and trauma. Which outcome will follow the experience of 'burnout' will depend on changes made in the individual, the various ecosystems, and their interactions.

2.1.4 Sources of Burnout

There are different theories or ideas about what produces 'burnout'? Since most of these theories have not undergone rigorous empirical tests, it is difficult to say what are the 'true' causes of 'burnout'. However, most discussions of 'burnout' emphasize contact with people and the factors that make contact particularly difficult or emotionally stressful. The bulk of the 'burnout' literature to date deals with the helping professions, probably because these are people-work situations par excellence. In addition to considering the dynamics of interpersonal relationships, causal analysis have focused on job stress and the characteristics of the organizational setting in which takes place. There have also been discussions of individual causes of 'burnout', such as personal expectations, motivations, and various personality traits. Neurotic anxiety, the 'Type A' syndrome, locus of control, flexibility and introversion have been found to be associated with reactions to
stress leading to 'burnout' (Cherniss, 1987). However, the emphasis so far has been on situational and social causes more than on personal ones.

There is a general agreement that 'burnout' – prone individuals are empathic, sensitive, humane, dedicated, idealistic and 'people-oriented' but also anxious, introverted, obsessional, overenthusiastic and susceptible to over-identification with others (Freudenberger, 1975; Block, 1977; Cheriness, 1980; Edelwich and Brodsky, 1980; Pines and Aroson, 1981). People who go into human service work want to help others and have an excessive need to 'give' and may base their self-esteem too exclusively on the attainment of unrealistic goals.

The research for causes of 'burnout', says Maslach (1978), is better directed away from identifying the bad people and toward uncovering the characteristics of the bad situations where many good people function.

For any professional group one could compile an almost endless list of work-related stresses. For example, all human service professionals complain of long hours, isolation, lack of autonomy, 'client neediness', inadequate salary, insufficient resources, lack of criteria to measure accomplishments, excessive demands for productivity, inadequate job training, administrative indifference or interference.

Those who work in the institutional rather than private settings are often faced with stresses endemic to organizational structures, like role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload (Kahn, 1974; Caplan and Jones,
Role overload is the most common complaint of those who work in organizations. This source of stress is likely to become more prevalent in the near future as a result of growth in the number of clients, depleted finance and job freeze. There may be a qualitative aspect of role overload as well, when increasingly complex work requires skills or abilities that are beyond an individuals current level of functioning.

The common element in most work related stresses is the feeling of inconsequentiality - a feeling on the part of the professionals that no matter how hard the work, the payoffs in terms of accomplishment, recognition, advancement, or appreciation are not there. To balance this discrepancy between input and output, burned out workers begin to give considerably less to their jobs. This sense of inconsequentiality is akin to Saligman's (1975) notion of 'learned helplessness'. Both concepts refer to a state in which individuals feel that their actions can no longer effect desired changes in the environment and therefore, there is no point in continuing to try.

'Burnout' may also be symptom of broader social concerns. Relatively recent and dramatic changes in family, work and social structures within Western Society the 'Culture of Narcissism' (Lasch, 1979) rooted in the competitive individualism of Western Civilization, moving away from a sense of community toward greater anonymity, impersonality and disconnectedness are at the root of increasing stress and 'burnout'. As a result of social fragmentation and uprootness, workers have become increasingly insistent upon attaining personal fulfillment and gratification from their work. The
combination of these two trends have produced workers with higher expectations of fulfillment and fewer resources to cope with frustrations - a perfect recipe for 'burnout'.

Present economic conditions, like recession and rising unemployment have also made career shifts more difficult. As a result, burned out professionals may find few economically comparable opportunities in other fields and may feel 'stuck' and increasingly resentful at remaining in their present job. Their sense of frustration grows and feelings of 'burnout' increases.

2.2 Teacher Burnout

Teacher 'burnout' is a human malfunction caused by continued, unresolved, job-related stress that results in once committed, dedicated teachers either abandoning the profession or remaining in the classroom, no longer motivated to provide the effective learning environment they once did for their students.

It is interesting to note that now a days 'teacher burnout' has become an increasingly concerned area of many researchers. As Schwab (1986) reports, there are several reasons for this high level of interest. First, the teaching profession is one of the largest and most visible professions in the United States. Second, the teaching profession has been subject to increased pressure by society to current social problems, educate students in academic and skill areas, provide enrichment activities, meet the individual needs of all students with a wide range of abilities, and encourage moral and ethical
development. Third, a number of national reports have illustrated the fact that many teachers are leaving the profession while fewer are choosing to become teachers. This has resulted in teacher shortages in certain disciplines and predictions of future shortages in all areas.

The first two observations of Schwab are equally fitting to our country and teachers too.

Most of the teachers begin their professional lives with the expectation that they will experience feelings of joy and accomplishment. Teachers take maximum efforts in order to accomplish the long term goals of their teaching. Teaching is a demanding profession which requires a constant giving of oneself at the mental, emotional and physical levels. Apart from the regular instructional work, teachers are expected to perform innumerable roles. Further, the public has all often overlooked the need of teachers as human beings. They are working constantly in an atmosphere of evaluation, judgement and fear. The combination of these factors creates a sense of frustration in teachers. A persistent feeling of frustration leads to what is known as 'burnout'.

2.2.1 Stages of Teacher Burnout

Misra (1985) quotes the views of Clouse and Whitaker (1981) with regard to stages of teacher 'burnout' as follows:

i. **Loss of Enthusiasm** : Most teachers enter the profession with good intentions and a sincere desire to help children. Energy levels are high,
ideals are strong. Majority of teachers are also individuals with decent value systems, a high sense of motivation, a desire to be needed and having an inner hope that through their intervention, something positive can be done with young people.

It has been suggested that many who enter teaching exhibit dependency characteristics where personal needs are met through helping others. That is, they obtain an overwhelming component of their self-identity from their work and therefore, have a strong need to be liked. When teachers do not receive positive responses and feedback from students, enthusiasm falters.

ii. Frustration: Frustration is one of the earliest signs in the process of 'burnout'. As already mentioned, several factors may contribute to the frustration of teachers within the school environment as well as outside, in the socio-political milieu. Student apathy, growing indiscipline and violence, uncooperative or over critical parents, low salary and social status and various malfunctions of the organisation and the profession itself are some of the factors. All these and many others may contribute to frustration and lowered morale of teachers and increase their stress and 'burnout'.

iii. Alienation: Alienation of the professional from the work environment may be viewed as a response or result of powerlessness, frustration and loss of meaning in one's work. Alienation is associated with detachment, withdrawal and isolation within the work environment. A strong relationship exists between alienation and lack of support and positive
feedback. Alienation is also directly related to the number of students with whom the professional has a direct contact. As the ratio increases, a higher emotional overload is inevitable. Inherent in the teaching profession is a high level of responsibility for a large number of students.

2.2.2 Symptoms of Teacher Burnout

Teachers experiencing such feelings of ‘burnout’ show a number of symptoms in their personal and professional life. Research has identified a number of these symptoms.

Personal symptoms include cynicism and negativism; rigid thinking, inflexibility and a closed mind, blocking progress and constructive changes; increased absenteeism and illness frequency; boredom and growing fatigue; loss of idealism and commitment; alienation and minimal compliance; verbalizing helplessness and hopelessness and fatalism; changes in behaviour and social contacts, e.g., becoming a loner, withdrawn or constantly socializing hypersensitivity and paranoia about colleagues and administrators.

Professional symptoms include growing doubts about professional career, dissatisfaction with level of performance and feeling inadequate and overwhelmed by task, reluctance to go to work or merging self and life with profession and withdrawing from activities previously rewarding. That is, under valuing or over valuing professional prerogatives and capabilities.
2.2.3 Consequences of Teacher Burnout

Teachers becoming unworthy to their profession, useless to their jobs are not uncommon. This is not only true in India but also elsewhere. Burnout in this context, refers to loss of enthusiasm, excitement and sense of mission to one's work. This is a state where one no longer lives to work but works only to live.

The consequences of 'burnout' are potentially very dangerous. Burnout negatively effects the teacher (e.g., mental and Emotional Exhaustion, a lower sense of Personal Accomplishment), the pupils (e.g., the burned-out teacher gives them less information, less praise, and pays less attention to students and their needs), and the organization (e.g., higher absenteeism, working hard but not accomplishing anything).

Viewed from another angle, the phenomenon of 'burnout' involves colossal wastage of our limited material and human resources. Much of the nation's scarce resources go into the education and training of teachers as well as other investments related to schools. But due to being burned out, the efficiency and effectiveness of these teachers is lost, the investment made in education yields no returns.